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PIETY WITHOUT ASCETICISM,

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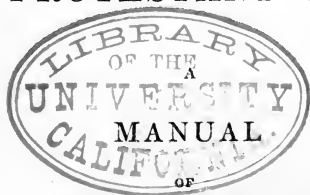
THE PROTESTANT KEMPIS.

Published by the Editor.

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- II. SACRED LITERATURE. 2d Edition.
- III. PRACTICAL THEOLOGY. 2 vols.
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PIETY
WITHOUT ASCETICISM,
OR
THE PROTESTANT KEMPIS:



CHRISTIAN FAITH AND PRACTICE,
SELECTED FROM
THE WRITINGS
OF
SCOUGAL, CHARLES HOW, AND CUDWORTH;
WITH CORRECTIONS, AND OCCASIONAL NOTES.

BY JOHN JEBB, D.D. F.R.S.
BISHOP OF LIMERICK, ARDFERT AND AGHADOE.

LONDON:
JAMES DUNCAN, 37. PATERNOSTER-ROW; AND
JOHN COCHRAN, 108. STRAND.

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‘ Some one has said, that, as often as he mingled in the company of men, he came out of it less humanized than he went in : and, to the truth of this, our own experience, after much conversation, bears testimony. It is much easier, to be wholly silent, than not to exceed in talk : and it is much easier to keep concealed at home, than to preserve ourselves from sin abroad. He, therefore, that presses forward to the perfection of the internal and spiritual life, must, with JESUS, withdraw from the multitude. No man can safely go abroad, that does not willingly stay at home ; no man can safely speak, that does not willingly hold his tongue ; no man can safely govern, that would not willingly be governed ; no man can safely command, that has not well learned to obey ; and no man can safely rejoice, but he that has the testimony of a good conscience.’ — *Thomas à Kempis.*

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P R E F A C E.

It has been long thought desirable by the Editor, that ‘the life of God in the soul of man,’ with some of the ‘Discourses of the Rev. Henry Scougal;’ the ‘Meditations of the Hon. Charles How;’ and two Sermons of the great Cudworth, usually annexed to his Intellectual System, — should reappear together, in a handsome volume. Conjointly, they seemed likely to do a service, for which, in their separate form, they were less perfectly adapted: presenting, as they do when taken together, a complete and harmonious scheme of practical religion. While, by the recommendation of an attractive appearance, they might, possibly, engage the attention of a class of readers, hitherto unacquainted with their very existence. Into these views, the respectable and spirited publishers cordially entered; and, it is hoped, that the present undertaking may be so far successful, as, at once, to remunerate their liberality, and to afford the public a specimen of Christian instruction, not only unexceptionable in its nature, but uniformly tending to edification of the best kind.

It must, indeed, be admitted, that, in the present day, there is no deficiency of religious publications; several excellent in their kind. But, it cannot be denied, that many offend against good taste; and, what is of far graver consequence, that many give erroneous and distorted views of the Gospel System. With either of these defects, the works which form this compilation do not, in any degree, seem chargeable. On the contrary, it may truly be affirmed, that they are written with great purity and elegance of manner, and that they present, to all capable minds, the very ‘pith and kernel’ of inward practical Christianity.

The writings of Scougal and How, in particular, frequently remind one of the ‘Imitation’ of Thomas à Kempis: but they are wholly free from that ascetic gloom, which, more or less, disfigures all Roman Catholic piety. In depth and interiority of religion, indeed, they cannot readily be excelled, or equalled; but they uniformly breathe the sober cheerfulness of the Divine Author of Christianity; and remind us of his heavenly injunction, that, whatever be our inward feelings, we should “anoint our head, and wash our face, and appear not unto men to fast.”

By our relish for books of this nature, we may, perhaps, best form a judgment of our spiritual state. And happy shall we be, if we feel ourselves gradually formed to that purity, humility, and love of God and man, which they always recommend and exemplify.

It may be satisfactory, to add a few words, concerning the respective Authors.

The Rev. HENRY SCOUGAL, A. M., second son of the Right Rev. PATRICK SCOUGAL, Bishop of Aberdeen, was born at Saltoun, in East Lothian, in the year 1650. From his earliest years, he was devoted, not less by his own choice, than by his father's piety, to the service of the ministry; and it is remarkable, that, almost from infancy, he took special delight in devotional retirement, in the study of the best books, and in the conversation of wise and good men; while, his very amusements indicated the greatness and energy of his mind; for, together with the most ingenious of his youthful associates, he was in the habit of composing little orations, and delivering them in the personated character of some distinguished Roman Senator.* At the University, he made a singular proficiency in classical and mathematical learning; but it was his chief delight to acquire just apprehensions of God and religion; and he fixed his notions deeply and permanently, by the composition of pious meditations, remarkable at once for exactness and eloquence. He was educated at the University of Aberdeen; where, at twenty years of age, he became Professor of Philosophy, and was the happy instrument of training multitudes to follow in his steps. On taking orders, he accepted

* A similar circumstance is related of Sir William Jones. See his *Life*, by Lord Teignmouth; and Dr. Johnstone's *Memoirs of Dr. Parr*.

the country parish of Auchterless ; and there, by unwearied diligence in catechizing, preaching, and instructing from house to house, he gave full proof, that the ministry was, indeed, his vocation. But he was soon called to a more important sphere. In 1675, by the unanimous voice of the electors, he was chosen Professor of Divinity, in King's College, Aberdeen ; from whence, in the midst of a full career of usefulness, he was mysteriously, but, no doubt, mercifully, removed to a better world, in the year 1678, at the early age of eight and twenty. ' Being made perfect in a short time, he fulfilled a long time : for wisdom is the grey hair unto men, and an unspotted life is old age.' *

From numerous testimonies to Scougal's chief work, it seems sufficient, to extract that of Bishop Burnet, ' that the book was a transcript of the divine impressions on his own heart ; and that he had written nothing in it, which he did not himself well know and feel.'

Of the Hon. CHARLES HOW, less is known, than might have been desired. He seems to have held the noiseless tenor of his way, in the exercise of an unobtrusive benevolence, and in the cultivation of his own heart.

* The profoundly learned, and pious John Smith of Cambridge, died also at the early age of thirty-five. See his select discourses, in the last edition, which is incomparably the best. It was published in 1821, by Messrs. Rivingtons and Cochran, Strand.

His ‘Meditations’ were intended merely for his private use; and, during his long life, no human eye saw them, but his own. After his death, however, they came into the possession of his grand-daughter; and, with her permission, were made public by her husband, Mr. George Mac Aulay; but, in the first instance, without the Author’s name. To the Second Edition this was prefixed, at the earnest suggestion of several good literary judges; among the rest, of Doctor Young, author of the Night Thoughts; whose testimony to the work, should, by no means, be omitted. ‘The book of Meditations,’ says this eminent man, ‘I have read, more than once; and I shall never lay it far out of my reach: for a greater demonstration of a sound head, and a sincere heart, I never saw.’

Mr. How was a gentleman of good fortune, and of a family ennobled in several of its branches. He was himself a native of Gloucestershire, but the stock originally came from the county of Nottingham. His birth took place in the year 1661; and, during the latter end of the reign of Charles II., he was much about the Court. In 1686, he went abroad in an official situation, in the suite of a near relative, ambassador to a foreign Court. And, his friend suddenly dying, he completed, by powers specially entrusted to him, the business of the embassy; with such reputation, that he had an offer of the full and permanent appointment to the diplomatic office. This, however, from a dislike

of the measures then pursued at court, he thought proper to decline ; and immediately returned to England. Soon after, he married a lady of rank and fortune ; who, dying in a few years, left behind her an only daughter, frequently mentioned in the Meditations. From this period, he lived, for the most part, in the country ; and spent many of his latter years in close retirement, consecrating his time to religious exercises and meditations. His conduct was exemplary, his conversation cheerful, and his death peaceful and serene. He reached the extraordinary term of eighty-four years ; when he exchanged the happiness of a virtuous and a good old age, for the greater, but congenial happiness, of a blessed immortality, A. D. 1745.

Of the excellent CUDWORTH, it were superfluous to speak in detail : the reputation of such men is the glory of our country. His writings, especially the Intellectual System, are known, and prized by the learned throughout Europe ; and will continue to be so, while piety and erudition are accounted valuable among men. His first Sermon, given in this Collection, was preached before the House of Commons, in the year 1647 ; and, with singular boldness and intrepidity, was directed point blank, and without compromise or qualification, against the epidemic evil of the times. In the present day, it were most desirable, that the mantle of Cudworth might descend upon some true son of the Church of England. He was born A. D. 1617, and died in the memorable year 1688.

The Editor will only add, that he has sometimes slightly modified the phraseology, where it seemed likely that ordinary readers might be checked, by the occurrence of an unusual, an antiquated, or an unobtrusive word. If he were re-publishing these tracts, as works of their respective Authors, it might, indeed, be proper to adhere, even to their errors, with scrupulous fidelity. But, in a practical and devotional manual, (and for such especially, this compilation is intended,) it seemed the first duty, to take care, that no slight obscurity, no awkwardness of expression, should be allowed to mar the general effect; whilst, at the same time, the sense, spirit, and peculiar vein of thought, of each writer, should be carefully preserved. He now concludes with an earnest wish, that these treatises may have, at least, a portion of the beneficial result, which they are eminently calculated to produce.

JOHN LIMERICK.

Leamington,
September 27. 1830.

IN THE MOUTH OF TWO OR THREE WITNESSES,
SHALL EVERY WORD BE ESTABLISHED.

SAINT PAUL.

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THE
NATURE AND EXCELLENCY
OF
THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION;
OR,
THE LIFE OF GOD, IN THE SOUL OF MAN;
WITH
SIX OTHER DISCOURSES
ON IMPORTANT SUBJECTS.

BY THE REV. HENRY SCOUGAL, A.M.

‘ Perfectionis ac felicitatis summum est uniri Deo.’

‘ Let not the word heaven be in our mouths only ; let it be in our hearts. Let us do the will of God on earth, as it is done in heaven ; and then we shall make it appear, that the kingdom of God is come, that it is come into us.

‘ Christians then live as such, when their life approaches nearer to the life of angels, and blessed saints ; when a life of purity and holiness, a life of entire resignation and obedience to the divine will, is their nature and element, their choice and delight.’ — *Dr. John Worthington.*



NATURE AND EXCELLENCY

OF

THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION.

PART I.

THE OCCASION OF THIS DISCOURSE.

My dear Friend,

THIS designation gives you a title to all the endeavours whereby I can serve your interests ; and your pious inclinations so happily conspire with my duty, that I need not step out of my road to gratify you. I may, at once, perform an office of friendship, and discharge an exercise of my function ; since the advancing of virtue and holiness (which I hope you make your greatest study) is the peculiar business of my employment. This, therefore, is the most proper instance wherein I can vent my affection, and express my gratitude towards you ; and I shall not any longer delay the performance of the promise I made you, to this purpose. For, though I know that you are provided with better helps of this nature, than any I can

offer ; and that you are not likely to meet with any thing here, which you knew not before ; yet I am hopeful, that what comes from one whom you are pleased to honour with your friendship, and which is more particularly designed for your use, will be kindly accepted by you ; and God's providence, perhaps, may so direct my thoughts, that something or other may prove useful to you. Nor shall I doubt your pardon, if, in order to mould my discourse into the better frame, I lay a low foundation, beginning with the nature and properties of religion ; and all along give such way to my thoughts, in the prosecution of the subject, as may bring me to say many things which were not necessary, did I only consider to whom I am writing.

MISTAKES ABOUT RELIGION.

I cannot speak of religion, without lamenting, that, among so many pretenders to it, so few understand what it means. Some place it in the understanding, in orthodox notions and opinions : and all the account they can give of their religion, is, that they are of this or the other persuasion, and have joined themselves to one of those many sects, into which Christendom is most unhappily divided. Others place it in the outward man, in a constant course of external duties : if they live peaceably with their neighbours, keep a temperate diet, observe the returns of worship, frequent the church, or their closet, and sometimes extend their hands to the relief of the poor, they think they have suffi-

ciently acquitted themselves. Others, again, place all religion in the affections, in rapturous heats and ecstatic devotion : and all they aim at, is, to pray with passion, to think of heaven with pleasure, and to be affected with those kind and melting expressions wherewith they court their Saviour ; till they persuade themselves that they are mightily in love with him, and, from thence, assume a great confidence of their salvation, which confidence, they esteem the chief of Christian graces. Thus, are those things which have any semblance of piety, and which, at the best, are but means of obtaining it, or particular exercises of it, frequently mistaken for the whole of religion ; nay, sometimes wickedness and vice pretend to that name. I speak not now of those gross impieties, wherewith the heathen were wont to worship their gods : there are but too many Christians, who would consecrate their vices, and hallow their corrupt affections ; whose rugged humour, and sullen pride, must pass for Christian severity ; whose fierce wrath, and bitter rage against their enemies, must be called holy zeal ; whose petulancy towards their superiors, or rebellion against their governors, must have the name of Christian courage and resolution.

WHAT RELIGION IS.

But, certainly, religion is quite another thing : and they who are acquainted with it, will entertain far different thoughts, and disdain all those shadows and false imitations of it. They know by experi-

ence, that true religion is an union of the soul with God, a real participation of the divine nature, the very image of God drawn upon the soul; or in the apostle's phrase, *it is Christ formed within us*. Briefly, I know not how the nature of religion can be more fully expressed, than by calling it *a divine life*.* And under these terms I shall discourse of it: showing, first how it is called *a life*; and then, how it is termed *divine*.

ITS PERMANENCY AND STABILITY.

I chuse to express it by the name of *life*: first, because of its permanency and stability. Religion is not a sudden start, or passion of the mind; not though it should rise to the height of a rapture, and seem to transport a man to extraordinary performances. There are few who have not convictions of the necessity of doing something for the salvation of their souls, which may push them forward some steps, with a great deal of seeming haste. But anon they flag and give over: they were in a hot mood, but now they are cooled; they did shoot forth fresh and high, but are quickly withered, — because they had no root in themselves. These sudden fits may

* ‘Such a life and knowledge as this is, peculiarly belongs to the true and sober Christian: who lives in him, who is life itself; and is enlightened by him, who is the truth itself; and is made partaker of the divine unction, and “knoweth all things,” as St. John speaks. This life is nothing else, but God’s own breath within him, and an *infant-Christ*, if I may use the expression, formed in his soul.’ — *John Smith. Select Discourses*, p. 24. — ED.

be compared to the violent and convulsive motions of bodies newly beheaded, caused by the agitations of the animal spirits, after the soul is departed ; which, however violent and impetuous, can be of no long continuance : whereas the motions of holy souls are constant and regular, proceeding from a permanent and lively principle. It is true, this divine life continues not always in the same strength and vigour ; it many times suffers sad decays ; and holy men often find greater difficulty in resisting temptations, and less alacrity in the performance of their duties, than they could wish : yet is the religious principle never quite extinguished, nor are they abandoned to the power of those corrupt affections, which sway and over-rule the rest of the world.

ITS FREEDOM AND UNCONSTRAINEDNESS.

Again, religion may be defined by the name of *life*, because it is an inward, free, and self-moving principle ; and those who have made progress in it, are not actuated only by external motives, driven merely by threatenings, nor bribed by promises, nor constrained by laws ; but are powerfully inclined to that which is good, and delight in the performance of it. The love which a pious man bears to God and goodness, is not so much in virtue of a command enjoining him so to do, as by a new nature instructing and prompting him to it ; nor does he pay his devotions as an unavoidable tribute, only to appease the divine justice, or to

quiet his clamorous conscience ; but those religious exercises are the proper emanations of the divine life, the natural employments of the new-born soul. He prays, and gives thanks, and repents, not only because these things are commanded, but rather because he is sensible of his wants, and of the divine goodness, and of the folly and misery of a sinful life. His charity is not forced, nor his alms extorted from him : his love makes him willing to give ; and, though there were no outward obligation, his “ heart would devise liberal things.” Injustice, intemperance, and all other vices, are as contrary to *his* temper and constitution, as the basest actions are to the most generous spirit, and impudence and scurrility to those who are naturally modest : so that I may well say with Saint John, “ Whosoever is born of God, doth not commit sin ; for his seed remaineth in him : and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.”* Though holy and religious persons much eye the law of God, and have a great regard unto it ; yet it is not so much the sanction of the law, as its reasonableness, and purity, and goodness, which prevail with them : they account it excellent and desirable in itself, and feel that in keeping of it there is great reward ; and that divine love wherewith they are actuated, makes them become a law unto themselves :

Quis legem det amantibus ?

Major est amor lex ipse sibi. †

Who shall prescribe a law to lovers ?

Love is a greater law, itself to itself.

* 1 John, iii. 9.

† Boethius.

In a word, what our blessed Saviour said of himself, is, in some measure, applicable to his followers, that “it is their meat and drink to do their Father’s will :” * and, as the natural appetite is carried out toward food, though we should not reflect on the necessity of it for the preservation of our lives ; so are they borne, with a natural and unforced propension, toward that which is good and commendable. It is true, external motives are many times of great use, to excite and stir up this inward principle ; especially in its infancy and weakness, when it is often so languid that the man himself can scarce discern it, hardly being able to move one step forward, but when he is pushed by his hopes or his fears ; by the pressure of an affliction, or the sense of a mercy ; by the authority of the law, or the persuasion of others. Now, if such a person be conscientious and uniform in his obedience, and earnestly groan under the sense of his dulness, and be desirous to perform his duties with more spirit and vigour ; these are the first motions of a divine life : which, though it be faint and weak, will surely be cherished by the influences of heaven, and grow unto greater maturity. But he who is utterly destitute of this inward principle, and does not aspire unto it, but contents himself with those performances whereunto he is prompted by education or custom, by the fear of hell, or by carnal notions of heaven, — can no more be accounted a religious person, than a puppet can

* John, iv. 34.

be called a man. This forced and artificial religion is commonly heavy and languid, like the motion of a weight forced upward: it is cold and spiritless, like the uneasy compliance of a wife married against her will, who carries it dutifully toward the husband whom she does not love, out of some sense of virtue and honour. Hence, also, this religion is scant and niggardly, especially in those duties which do greatest violence to men's carnal inclinations; and those slavish spirits will be sure to do no more, than is absolutely required. It is a law which compels them, and they will be loth to go beyond its strict demands; nay, they will ever be putting such glosses on it, as may leave themselves the greatest liberty. Whereas, the spirit of true religion is frank and liberal, far from such peevish and narrow reckoning; and he who has given himself entirely to God, will never think he does too much for Him.

RELIGION A DIVINE PRINCIPLE.

By this time I hope it appears, that religion is, with a great deal of reason, termed *a life*, or vital principle; and that it is very necessary to distinguish between it, and that obedience which is constrained, and depends on external causes.

I come next to give an account, why I defined it by the name of *divine life*. And so it may be called, not only with respect to its fountain and original, having God for its author, and being wrought in the souls of men by the power of his

Holy Spirit, but with respect to its nature also ; religion being a resemblance of the divine perfections, the image of the Almighty shining in the soul of man : nay, it is a real participation of his nature ; it is a beam of the eternal light, a drop of that infinite ocean of goodness ; and they who are endued with it, may be said to have God dwelling in their souls, and Christ formed within them.

WHAT THE NATURAL LIFE IS.

Before I descend to a more particular consideration of that divine life wherein true religion consists, it will, perhaps, be fit to speak a little of that natural, or animal life, which prevails in those who are strangers to the divine. And by this I understand nothing else, but our inclination and propension toward those things which are pleasing and acceptable to nature : or self-love, issuing forth, and spreading itself into as many branches, as men have several appetites and inclinations. The root and foundation of the animal life I reckon to be *sense*; taking it largely, as it is opposed to faith, and as it imports our perception and sensation of things that are either grateful or troublesome. Now, these animal affections considered in themselves, and as they are implanted in us by nature, are not vicious or blameable ; nay, they are instances of the wisdom of the Creator, furnishing his creatures with such appetites as tend to the preservation and welfare of their lives. These are instead of a law unto the brute beasts ; whereby they are directed

towards the ends for which they were made. But man, being made for higher purposes, and to be guided by more excellent laws, becomes guilty and criminal, when he is so far transported by the inclinations of this lower life, as to violate his duty, or neglect the higher and more noble designs of his creation. Our natural affections are not wholly to be extirpated and destroyed; but only to be moderated and over-ruled by a superior and more excellent principle. In a word, the difference between a religious and wicked man, is, that in the one, divine life bears sway, in the other, animal life prevails.

THE DIFFERENT TENDENCIES OF THE NATURAL LIFE.

But it is strange to observe, unto what different courses this natural principle will sometimes carry those who are wholly guided by it, according to the diverse circumstances that concur with it to determine them. And the not considering this, frequently occasions very dangerous mistakes, making men think well of themselves on account of that seeming difference which is between them and others; whereas, perhaps, their actions all the while flow from one and the same original. If we consider the natural temper and constitution of men's souls, we shall find some to be airy, frolicksome, and light, which makes their behaviour extravagant and ridiculous: others are naturally serious and severe, and their whole carriage is composed into such gravity, as gains them a great deal of

reverence and esteem. Some are of an humorous, rugged, and morose temper, and can neither be pleased themselves, nor endure that others should be so. But all are not born with such sour and unhappy dispositions; some persons have a certain sweetness and benignity rooted in their natures, and they find the greatest pleasure in the endearments of society, and the mutual complacency of friends, and covet nothing more, than to have every body obliged to them. And it is well that nature has provided this complexional tenderness, to supply the defect of true charity in the world, and to incline men to do something for one another's welfare. Again, with respect to education, some have never been taught to follow any other rules than those of pleasure or advantage; but others are so inured to observe the strictest rules of decency and honour, and, in some instances, of virtue, that they are hardly capable of doing any thing which they have been accustomed to look upon as base and unworthy.

In fine, it is no small difference in the deportment of mere natural men, that arises from the strength or weakness of their wit or judgment, and from their care or negligence in using them. Intemperance and impurity, injustice and oppression, and all those other impieties which abound in the world, and render it so miserable, are the issues of self-love; the effect of the *animal life*, when it is neither overpowered by religion, nor governed by natural reason. But, if it once take hold of reason, and

get judgment and wit to be of its party, it will, many times, disdain the grosser sort of vices, and spring up unto fair imitations of virtue and goodness. If a man have but so much reason, as to consider the prejudice which intemperance and inordinate desires bring upon his health, his fortune, and his reputation, self-love may suffice to restrain him : and one may observe the rules of moral justice in dealing with others, as the best way to secure his own interest, and maintain his credit in the world. But this is not all. This natural principle, by the help of reason, may take a higher flight, and come nearer the excellence of piety and religion. It may incline a man to the diligent study of divine truths ; for why should not these, as well as other speculations, be pleasant and grateful to curious and inquisitive minds ? It may make men zealous in maintaining and propagating such opinions as they have espoused, and desirous that others should submit to their judgment, and approve the choice of religion which themselves have made. It may make them delight to hear and compose excellent discourses, about the matters of religion ; for eloquence is very pleasant, whatever be the subject. Nay, some it may dispose to no small height of sensible devotion. The glorious things that are spoken of heaven, may make even a carnal heart in love with it ; the metaphors and similitudes made use of in Scripture, of crowns and sceptres, and rivers of pleasure, will easily affect a man's fancy, and make him wish to be there, though

he neither understand nor desire those spiritual pleasures, which are described and shadowed forth by those similitudes. And, when such a person comes to believe that Christ has purchased those glorious things for him, he may feel a kind of tenderness and affection towards so great a benefactor, and imagine that he is mightily enamoured with him; and yet, all the while, he may continue a stranger to the holy temper and spirit of the blessed Jesus. And what share the natural constitution may have in the rapturous devotions of some melancholy persons, has been excellently discovered of late, by several learned and judicious pens.

To conclude, there is nothing proper to make a man's life pleasant, or himself eminent and conspicuous in the world, to which this natural principle, assisted by wit and reason, may not prompt him. And, though I do not condemn these things in themselves, yet it concerns us nearly to know and consider their nature; both that we may keep within due bounds, and also that we may learn never to value ourselves on account of such attainments, nor give the name of religion to our natural appetites or performances.

WHEREIN THE DIVINE LIFE CONSISTS.

It is now time to return to the consideration of that *divine life*, whereof I was discoursing before; that "life which is hid with Christ in God," and therefore has no glorious show or appearance in the world, and to the natural man will seem a

mean and insipid notion. As the animal life consists in that narrow and confined love which terminates in a man's self, and in his propension towards those things which are pleasing to nature ; so the divine life stands in an universal and unbounded affection, and in the mastery over our natural inclinations, that they may never be able to betray us to those things which we know to be blameable.

The root of the divine life is faith ; the chief branches are, love to God, charity to man, purity, and humility : for, as an excellent person has well observed, however these names be common and vulgar, and make no extraordinary sound, yet they carry such a mighty sense, that the tongue of man or angel, can pronounce nothing more weighty or excellent.

Faith has the same place in the divine life, which *sense* has in the natural ; being, indeed, nothing else, but a kind of sense, or feeling persuasion of spiritual things. It extends itself unto all divine truths : but, in our lapsed estate, it has a peculiar relation to the declaration of God's mercy and reconcileableness to sinners through a Mediator ; and therefore, receiving its denomination from that principal object, is ordinarily termed *faith in Jesus Christ*.

The *love* of God is a delightful and affectionate sense of the divine perfections ; which makes the soul resign and sacrifice itself wholly unto him, desiring above all things to please him, and delighting in nothing so much, as in fellowship and com-

munions with him, and in being ready to do or suffer any thing, for his sake, or at his pleasure. Though this affection may have its first rise from the favours and mercies of God towards ourselves, yet, in its growth and progress, it transcends such particular considerations, and grounds itself on his infinite goodness, manifested in all the works of creation and providence. A soul thus possessed with divine love, must needs be enlarged towards all mankind in a sincere and unbounded affection, because of the relation they have to God, being his creatures, and having something of his image stamped upon them. And this is that *charity*, which I named as the second branch of religion, and under which, all the parts of justice, all the duties which we owe to our neighbour, are eminently comprehended: for he who truly loves all the world, will be nearly concerned in the interest of every one; and, far from wronging or injuring any person, will resent any evil that befalls others, as if it happened to himself.

By *purity*, I understand a due abstractedness from the body, and mastery over the inferior appetites; or such a temper and disposition of mind, as makes a man despise, and abstain from, all pleasures and delights of sense or fancy, which are sinful in themselves, or which tend to extinguish or lessen our relish for more divine and intellectual pleasures; which also infers a resoluteness to undergo all those hardships he may meet with, in the performance of his duty: so that, not only chastity and

temperance, but also Christian courage and magnanimity, may come under this head.

Humility, imports a deep sense of our own meanness, with a hearty and affectionate acknowledgment of our owing all that we are to the divine bounty : which is always accompanied by a profound submission to the will of God, and by great deadness towards the glory of the world, and applause of men.

These are the highest perfections of which either men or angels are capable ; the very foundation of heaven laid in the soul. And he who has attained them, needs not pry into the hidden rolls of God's decrees, or search the volumes of heaven, to know what is determined about his everlasting condition ; he may find a copy of God's thoughts concerning him, written in his own breast. His love to God, may give him assurance of God's favour to him ; and those beginnings of happiness, which he feels, in the conformity of the powers of his soul to the nature of God, and in compliance with his will, are a sure pledge that his felicity shall be perfected, and continued to all eternity. And it is not without reason that one said, ' I had rather see the real impressions of a God-like nature upon my own soul, than have a vision from heaven, or an angel sent to tell me that my name were enrolled in the book of life.'*

* ' Though I think it worthy of a Christian, to endeavour the assurance of his own salvation ; yet, perhaps, it might be the safest way to moderate his curiosity of prying into God's book of life, and to stay awhile, until he sees himself within the confines of salvation itself. Should a man hear a voice from

RELIGION BETTER UNDERSTOOD BY ACTIONS THAN
BY WORDS.

When we have said all that we can, the secret mysteries of a new nature and divine life, can never

heaven, or see a vision from the Almighty, to testify unto him the love of God towards him, yet, methinks, it were more desirable, to find a revelation of all from within, arising up from the bottom and centre of a man's own soul, in the real and internal impressions of a godlike nature upon his own spirit; and thus, to find the foundation and beginning of heaven and happiness within himself: it were more desirable, to see the crucifying of our own will, the mortifying of the mere animal life, and to see a divine life rising up in the room of it, as a sure pledge and inchoation of immortality and happiness, the very essence of which, consists in a perfect conformity, and cheerful compliance, of all the powers of our souls, with the will of God.

The best way of gaining a well-grounded assurance of the divine love, is this, for a man to overcome himself, and his own will: "To him that overcometh shall be given that white stone, and in it the new name written, which no man knoweth, but he that receiveth it." He that beholds the sun of righteousness arising upon the horizon of his soul, with healing in its wings, and chaseth away all that misty darkness of his own self-will and passions, — such a one desires not now the star-light, to know whether it be day or not; nor cares he, to pry into heaven's secrets, and to search into the hidden rolls of eternity, there to see the whole plot of his salvation; for he views it, transacted upon the inward stage of his own soul, and, reflecting upon himself, he may behold a heaven opened from within, and a throne set up in his soul, and an Almighty Saviour sitting upon it, and reigning within him: he now finds the kingdom of heaven within him, and sees that it is not a thing merely reserved for him without him, being already made partaker of the sweetness and efficacy of it. — *John Smith's Select Discourses*, p. 460. ed. 8vo. — Ed.

be sufficiently expressed ; language and words cannot reach them ; nor can they be truly understood, but by those souls that are enkindled within, and awakened to the sense and relish of spiritual things : “ There is a spirit in man, and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth this understanding.” The power and life of religion may be better expressed in actions than in words ; because actions are more lively things, and better represent the inward principle whence they proceed. And, therefore, we may take the best measure of those gracious endowments, from the deportment of those in whom they reside ; especially, as they are perfectly exemplified in the holy life of our blessed Saviour ; a main part of whose business in this world, was, to teach by his practice what he required of others, and to make his own conversation an exact resemblance of those unparalleled rules which he prescribed : so that, if ever true goodness was visible to mortal eyes, it was then, when his presence did beautify and illustrate this lower world.

DIVINE LOVE EXEMPLIFIED IN OUR SAVIOUR ; HIS
DILIGENCE IN DOING GOD’S WILL, AND HIS PA-
TIENCE IN BEARING IT.

That sincere and devoted affection with which his blessed soul constantly regarded his heavenly Father, expressed itself in an entire resignation to his will. This was his “ very meat, to do the will, and finish the work, of Him that sent

him." This was the exercise of his childhood, this the constant employment of his riper age. He spared no travail or pains, while he was about his Father's business, but took such infinite content and satisfaction in the performance of it, that, when, faint and weary with his journey, he rested himself on Jacob's well, and intreated water of the Samaritan woman, the success of his conference with her, and the accession which was made to the kingdom of God, filled his mind with such delight, as seemed to have redounded to his very body; refreshing his spirits, and making him forget the thirst of which he had complained before, and refuse the meat, which he had sent his disciples to buy.

Nor was he less patient and submissive in suffering, than diligent in performing, the will of God. He endured the sharpest afflictions, and extremest miseries, that ever were inflicted on any mortal, without a repining thought, or discontented word. For, though he was far from a stupid insensibility, or a fantastic or Stoical obstinacy, and had as quick a sense of pain as other men, and the deepest apprehension of what he was to suffer in his soul, (as his bloody sweat, and the sore amazement and sorrow which he professed, abundantly declare;) yet he entirely submitted, and willingly acquiesced in, that severe dispensation of providence.

And he prayed to God, that "if it were possible" (or, as one of the Evangelists has it, "if he

were willing,") "that cup might be removed ;" yet he gently added, "Nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done." Of what strange import are the expressions, where he first acknowledges the anguish of his spirit, "Now is my soul troubled : " which would seem to produce a kind of demur, "And what shall I say?" And then he proceeds, to deprecate his sufferings, "Father, save me from this hour ;" words, which he had no sooner uttered, than, as it were, on second thoughts, he recalls them, in these expressions : "But for this cause came I into the world ;" and concludes, "Father, glorify thy name." Now, we must not look on this, as any levity, or blameable weakness in the blessed Jesus. He knew, all along, what he was to suffer, and did most resolutely undergo it. But it shows us the inconceivable weight and pressure that he was to bear ; which, being so afflicting, and so contrary to nature, he could not think of it without terror ; yet, considering the will of God, and the glory which from thence was to redound to him, he was not only content, but desirous, to suffer to the uttermost.

HIS CONSTANT DEVOTION.

Another instance of his love to God, was his delight in conversing with Him by prayer. This made him frequently retire from the world, and, with the greatest devotion and pleasure, spend whole nights in that heavenly exercise, though he had no sins to confess, and but few secular interests to

pray for. Which, alas! are almost the only things that are wont to drive us to our devotions. Nay, we may say his whole life was a kind of prayer, a constant course of communion with God. If the sacrifice was not always offering, yet was the fire still kept alive. Nor was ever the blessed Jesus surprized, with that dulness or tepidity of spirit, which we must, many times, wrestle with, before we can be fit for the exercise of devotion.

HIS CHARITY TO MEN.

In the *second* place, I should speak of his love and charity towards all men. But he who would express it, must transcribe the history of the gospel, and comment upon it: for scarce any thing is recorded to have been done or spoken by him, which was not designed for the good and advantage of some one or other. All his miraculous works were instances of his goodness, as well as his power; and they benefited those on whom they were wrought, as well as amazed the beholders. His charity was not confined to his kindred or relations: nor was all his kindness swallowed up, in the endearments of that peculiar friendship, which he felt towards the beloved disciple; every one was his friend, who obeyed his holy commands; and “whosoever did the will of his Father,” the same was as “his brother, and sister, and mother.”

Never was any person unwelcome to him, who came with an honest intention; nor did he deny any

request, which tended to the good of those that asked it. So that, what was spoken of that Roman emperor, whom, for his goodness, they called the darling of mankind*, was really performed by him. Never did any depart from him with a heavy countenance, except that rich youth†, who was sorry to hear, that the kingdom of heaven was valued at a rate so costly, and that he could not save his soul and his money too. And, certainly, it troubled our Saviour, to see, that, when a price was in his hand to get wisdom, yet he had no heart to it. The ingenuousness that appeared in his first address, had already procured some kindness for him ; for it is said, “ And Jesus beholding him, loved him.” But must he, for his sake, cut out a new way to heaven, and alter the nature of things, which make it impossible that a covetous man can be happy ?

And what shall I speak of his meekness, who could encounter the monstrous ingratitude and dissimulation of his betrayer, in no harsher terms than “ Judas, betrayest thou the Son of man with a kiss ? ” What further evidence could we desire, of his fervent and unbounded charity, than, that he willingly laid down his life even for his most bitter enemies ; and, mingling his prayers with his blood, besought the Father, that his death might not be laid to their charge, but might become the means of eternal life, to those very persons who procured it ?

* *Deliciæ humani generis.*

† Mark, x.

HIS PURITY.

The *third* branch of the divine life is *purity*; which, as I said, consists in a neglect of worldly enjoyments and accommodations, and in a resolute endurance of all such troubles, as we meet with in doing our duty. Now, surely, if ever any person was wholly dead to all the pleasures of the natural life, it was the blessed Jesus; who seldom tasted them when they came in his way, but never stepped out of his road to seek them. Though he supplied the want of wine with a miracle, yet he would not work one for the relief of his own hunger in the wilderness: so gracious and divine was the temper of his soul, in allowing to others such lawful gratifications, as himself thought good to abstain from; and supplying, not only their more extreme and pressing necessities, but even their smaller and less considerable wants. We, many times, hear of our Saviour's sighs, and groans, and tears; but never, that he laughed, and but once, that he rejoiced in spirit; so that, through his whole life, he exactly answered that character given of him by the prophet of old: he was "a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief." Nor were the troubles and disaccommodations of his life, other than matter of choice. For never did any one appear on the stage of the world, with greater advantage to have raised himself to the highest secular felicity. He who could bring together such a prodigious number of fishes into his 'disciples' net, and, at another time, receive that

tribute from a fish, which he was to pay to the temple, might easily have made himself the richest person in the world. Nay, without any money, he could have maintained an army powerful enough to have jostled Cæsar out of his throne; having, oftener than once, fed several thousands with a few loaves and small fishes. But, to show how small esteem he had for all the enjoyments in the world, he chose to live in so poor and mean a condition, that “though the foxes had holes, and the birds of the air had nests, yet he who was lord and heir of all things, had not whereon to lay his head.” He did not frequent the courts of princes, nor affect the acquaintance and converse of great ones; but, being reputed the son of a carpenter, he had fishermen, and such other poor people, for his companions, and lived in such a manner, as suited the meanness of that condition.

HIS HUMILITY.

And thus I am brought unawares to speak of his *humility*; the last branch of the divine life, wherein he was a most eminent pattern to us, that we might “learn of him, to be meek and lowly in heart.” I shall not now speak of that infinite condescension of the eternal Son of God, in taking our nature upon him; but only reflect on our Saviour’s lowly and humble deportment, while he was in the world. He had none of those sins and imperfections, which may justly humble the best of men; but he was so entirely swallowed up, with a

deep sense of the infinite perfections of God, that he appeared as nothing in his own eyes, I mean, so far as he was a creature. He considered those eminent perfections which shone in his blessed soul, as not his own, but the gifts of God; and, therefore, assumed nothing to himself for them, but, with the profoundest humility, renounced all pretences to them. Hence, he refused that ordinary compellation of *good master*, when addressed to his human nature, by one, who, it seems, was ignorant of his divinity: “Why callest thou me good? there is none good, but God only:” as if he had said, ‘The goodness of any creature (and such only, thou takest me to be), is not worthy to be named or taken notice of; it is God alone, who is originally and essentially good.’ He never made use of his miraculous power, for vanity or ostentation. He would not gratify the curiosity of the Jews, with a sign from heaven, with some prodigious appearance in the air: nor would he follow the advice of his countrymen and kindred, who would have had all his great works performed in the eyes of the world, for the purpose of gaining him the greater fame. But, when his charity had prompted him to the relief of the miserable, his humility made him, many times, enjoin the concealment of the miracle; and when the glory of God, and the design for which he came into the world, required the publication of his mighty works, he ascribed the honour of all to his Father, telling them, “that of himself he was able to do nothing.”

I cannot insist on all the instances of humility, in his deportment towards men: his withdrawing himself, when they would have made him a king; his subjection, not only to his blessed mother, but to her husband, during his younger years; and his submission to all the indignities which his rude and malicious enemies affixed upon him. The history of his holy life, recorded by those who conversed with him, is full of such passages as these. And, indeed, the serious and attentive study of it, is the best way to get right measures of humility, and all the other parts of religion, which I have been attempting to describe.

But now, that I may lessen your trouble in reading a long letter, by making some pauses in it, let me here subjoin a prayer; which might be proper, when one, who had formerly entertained some false notions of religion, begins to discover what it is.

A PRAYER.

‘ INFINITE and eternal Majesty, author and fountain of being and blessedness, how little do we, poor sinful creatures, know of Thee, or the way to serve and please Thee! We talk of religion, and pretend to it; but, alas! how few are there that know and consider what it means! How easily do we mistake the affections of our nature, and the issues of self-love, for those divine graces which alone can render us acceptable in thy sight! It may justly grieve me, to consider, that I should have wandered so long, and contented myself so often,

with vain shadows and false images of piety and religion. Yet, I cannot but acknowledge and adore thy goodness, who hast been pleased, in some measure, to open mine eyes, and to let me see what it is, at which I ought to aim. I rejoice, to consider, of what mighty improvements my nature is capable, and what a divine temper of spirit shines in those, whom Thou art pleased to chuse, and causest to approach unto thee. Blessed be thine infinite mercy, who sentest thine own Son, to dwell among men, and to instruct them by his example, as well as by his laws ; giving them a perfect pattern of what they ought to be. O that the holy life of the blessed Jesus, may be always in my thoughts, and before mine eyes, till I receive a deep sense and impression, of those excellent graces which shone so eminently in him. And, let me never cease my endeavours, till that new and divine nature prevail in my soul, and Christ be formed within me.’

PART II.

THE EXCELLENCY AND ADVANTAGE OF RELIGION.

AND now, my dear friend, having discovered the nature of true religion, before I proceed any further, it will not, perhaps, be unfit to employ our meditations a little on its excellency and advantages; that we may be excited to the more vigorous and diligent prosecution of those methods, whereby we may obtain so great a felicity. But, what words shall we find, to express that inward satisfaction, those hidden pleasures, which can never be rightly understood, but by those holy souls who feel them? “A stranger intermeddleth not with their joy.”* Holiness, is the right temper, the vigorous and healthful constitution, of the soul. Its faculties had formerly been so enfeebled and disordered, that they could not exercise their natural functions; it had wearied itself with endless tossings and rollings, and was never able to find any rest: now, that distemper being removed, it feels itself well; there is a due harmony in its faculties, and a sprightly vigour possesses every part. The understanding can discern what is good, and the will can cleave unto it; the affections are not tied to the motions of sense, and the influence

* Prov. xiv. 10.

of external objects ; they are stirred by more divine impressions, they are touched by a sense of invisible things.

THE EXCELLENCY OF DIVINE LOVE.

Let us now descend, if you please, to a nearer and more particular view of religion, in those several branches of it which were named before. Let us consider the love and affection by which holy souls are united to God, that we may see what excellency and felicity it involves. Love is that powerful and prevalent passion, by which all the faculties and inclinations of the soul are determined, and on which both its perfection and happiness depend. The worth and excellency of a soul is to be measured by the object of its love : he who loves mean and sordid things, thereby becomes base and vile ; but a noble and well-placed affection, advances and improves the spirit, into a conformity with the perfections which it loves. The images of these, frequently present themselves to the mind, and, by a secret force and energy, insinuate themselves into the very constitution of the soul, and mould and fashion it unto their own likeness. Hence we may see, how easily lovers or friends slide into the imitation of the persons whom they regard ; and how, even before they are aware, they begin to resemble them, not only in the more considerable instances of their deportment, but in their very voice and gesture, and in that which we call their mien and air. And, certainly, we should

as well transcribe the virtues and inward beauties of the soul, if they were the object and motive of our love. But now, as all the creatures with whom we converse, have their mixture and alloy, we are always in danger of being sullied and corrupted, by placing our affections on them. Passion easily blinds our eyes, so that we first approve, and then imitate, the things that are blameable in their conduct. The true way to improve and ennoble our souls, is by fixing our love on the divine perfections; that we may have them always before us, and may derive an impression of them on ourselves; and, “beholding, with open face, as in a glass, the glory of the Lord, we may be changed into the same image, from glory to glory.” He, who, with a generous and holy ambition, has raised his eyes towards that uncreated beauty and goodness, and fixed his affection there, is quite of another spirit, of a more excellent and heroic temper, than the rest of the world; he cannot but infinitely disdain all mean and unworthy things; and will not entertain any low or base thoughts, which might disparage his high and noble pretensions. Love is the greatest and most excellent thing we are masters of: and, therefore, it is folly and baseness to bestow it unworthily; it is, indeed, the only thing we can call our own: other things may be taken from us by violence, but none can ravish our love. If any thing else be counted ours, by giving our love we give all: we make over our hearts and wills, by which we possess all other enjoyments. It is not

possible to refuse him any thing, to whom, by love, we have given ourselves. Nay, since it is the privilege of gifts, to receive their value from the mind of the giver, and not to be measured by the event, but by the desire, — he who loveth, may, in some sense, be said not only to bestow all that he has, but all things else which may make the beloved person happy ; since he heartily wishes them, and would readily give them, if they were in his power : in which sense it is, that one makes bold to say, ‘That divine love doth, in a manner, give God unto himself; by the complacency it takes, in the happiness and perfection of his nature.’ But, though this may seem too strained an expression, certainly love is the worthiest present we can offer unto God ; and it is extremely debased, when we bestow it in any other way.

When this affection is misplaced, it often vents itself in such expressions, as point at its genuine and proper object, and insinuate where it ought to be placed. The flattering and blasphemous terms of adoration, in which men sometimes express their passion, are the language of that affection which was made and designed for God* ; as he who is accustomed to speak to some great person,

* An example may be cited, from an author who rarely thus offends : —

“ Come, Stella, queen of all my heart !

Come, born to fill its vast desires !

Thy looks perpetual joys impart,

Thy voice perpetual love inspires.”

Johnson. — ED.

will, perhaps unawares, accost another with those titles which he was wont to give to him. But certainly that passion which accounts its object a Deity, ought to be bestowed on Him alone, who really is so. Those unlimited submissions, which would debase the soul, if directed to any other, will exalt and ennoble it when placed here. Those chains and cords of love are infinitely more glorious than liberty itself; this slavery is more noble, than all the empires in the world.

THE ADVANTAGES OF DIVINE LOVE.

Again, as divine love advances and elevates the soul, so it is that alone which can make it happy. The highest and most enchanting pleasures, the most solid and substantial delights, of which human nature is capable, are those which arise from the endearments of a well-placed and successful affection. That which embitters love, and makes it ordinarily a very troublesome and hurtful passion, is the fixing it on those, who have not worth enough to deserve it, or affection and gratitude to requite it, or whose absence may deprive us of the pleasure of their converse, or their miseries occasion our trouble. To all these evils are they exposed, whose chief and supreme affection is fixed on creatures like themselves: but the love of God delivers us from them all.

THE WORTH OF THE OBJECT.

First, love must needs be miserable, and full of trouble and disquietude, when there is not worth

and excellency enough in the object, to answer the vastness of its capacity. So eager and violent a passion, cannot but fret and torment the spirit, when it finds not materials to satisfy its cravings. And, indeed, so large and unbounded is its nature, that it must be extremely pinched and straitened, when confined to any creature; nothing below an infinite good can afford it room to stretch itself, and exert its vigour and activity. What is a little skin-deep beauty, or some small degrees of goodness, to match or satisfy a passion which was made for God; designed to embrace an infinite good? No wonder lovers so hardly suffer any rival, and do not desire that others should approve their passion by imitating it. They know the scantiness and narrowness of the good which they love; that it cannot suffice two, being, in effect, too little for one. Hence love, "which is strong as death," occasions "jealousy which is cruel as the grave;" the coals whereof are coals of fire, which has a most violent flame.

But divine love has no mixture of this gall; when once the soul is fixed on that supreme and all-sufficient good, it finds so much perfection and goodness, as not only answers and satisfies its affection, but masters and overpowers it too: it finds all its love to be too faint and languid for such a noble object, and is only sorry that it can command no more. It wishes for the flames of a seraph, and longs for the time when it shall be wholly melted and dissolved into love: and, be-

cause it can do so little itself, it desires the assistance of the whole creation, that angels and men would concur with it, in the admiration and love of those infinite perfections.

THE CERTAINTY TO BE BELOVED AGAIN.

Again, love is accompanied with trouble, when it misses a suitable return of affection; love is the most valuable thing we can bestow, and by giving it, we give, in effect, all that we have: and, therefore, it must needs be afflicting to find so great a gift despised; that the present, which one has made of his whole heart, cannot prevail to obtain any return. Perfect love is a kind of self-derelection, a wandering out of ourselves; it is a kind of voluntary death, wherein the lover dies to himself, and to his own interests, not thinking of them, nor caring for them any more, and minding nothing but how he may please and gratify the party whom he loves. Thus, he is quite undone, unless he meets with reciprocal affection; he neglects himself, and the other has no regard to him; but if he be beloved, he is revived, as it were, and lives in the soul and care of the person whom he loves; and now he begins to mind his own concerns, not so much because they are his, as because the beloved is pleased to own an interest in them. He becomes dear unto himself, because he is so unto the other.

But why should I enlarge on so known a matter? Nothing can be more clear, than that the happi-

ness of love depends on the return it meets with. And here the divine lover has unspeakably the advantage, having placed his affection on him whose nature is love; whose goodness is as infinite as his being; whose mercy prevented us, when we were his enemies, and, therefore, cannot help embracing us, when we are become his friends. It is utterly impossible, that God should deny his love to a soul wholly devoted to him, and which desires nothing so much, as to serve and please him. He cannot disdain his own image, nor the heart in which it is engraven. Love is all the tribute which we can pay; and it is a sacrifice which he will not despise.

THE PRESENCE OF THE BELOVED PERSON.

Another thing which disturbs the pleasure of love, and renders it a miserable and unquiet passion, is absence and separation from those we love. It is not without a sensible affliction that friends part, though for a little time. It is sad to be deprived of that society which is so delightful; our life becomes tedious, being spent in an impatient expectation of the happy hour wherein we may meet again. But if death have made the separation, as at some time or other it must, this occasions a grief scarce to be paralleled by all the misfortunes of human life, and wherein we pay dear enough for the comforts of friendship. But O how happy are those who have placed their love on Him, who can never be absent from them! they need but

open their eyes, and they shall every where behold the traces of his presence and glory, and converse with him whom their soul loveth. And this makes the darkest prison, or wildest desert, not only supportable, but delightful to them.

THE DIVINE LOVE MAKES US PARTAKE OF AN
INFINITE HAPPINESS.

In fine, a lover is miserable, if the person whom he loves be so. They who have made an exchange of hearts by love, get, thereby, an interest in one another's happiness and misery: and this makes love a troublesome passion, when placed on earth. The most fortunate person has grief enough to mar the tranquillity of his friend; and it is hard to hold out, when we are attacked on all hands, and suffer, not only in our own person, but in that of another. But if God were the object of our love, we should share in an infinite happiness, without any mixture or possibility of diminution: we should rejoice to behold the glory of God, and receive comfort and pleasure, from all the praises with which he is extolled, by men and angels. It should delight us beyond all expression, to consider, that the beloved of our souls is infinitely happy in himself, and that all his enemies cannot shake or unsettle his throne: "that our God is in the heavens, and doeth whatever he pleaseth."

Behold! on what sure foundations his happiness is built, whose soul is possessed with divine love; whose will is transformed into the will of God; and

whose greatest desire is, that his Maker should be pleased: O the peace, the rest, the satisfaction, which attends on such a temper of mind!

HE THAT LOVES GOD FINDS SWEETNESS IN EVERY
DISPENSATION.

What an infinite pleasure must it needs be, thus, as it were, to lose ourselves in Him, and, swallowed up in the overcoming sense of his goodness, to offer ourselves a living sacrifice, always ascending to him in flames of love. Never does a soul know what solid joy and substantial pleasure is, till, being weary of itself, it renounces all self-property, gives itself up to the author of its being, and feels itself become a hallowed and devoted thing. Till it can say, from an inward sense and feeling, ‘*My beloved is mine*, I account all his interest mine own. *And I am His*; I am content to be any thing for him; I care not for myself, but that I may serve him.’ A person moulded into this temper, would find pleasure in all the dispensations of Providence. Temporal enjoyments would have another relish, when he could taste the divine goodness in them, and consider them as tokens of love sent by his dearest Lord and Maker. And chastisements, though they be not joyous but grievous, would lose their sting: the rod as well as the staff would comfort him; he would snatch a kiss from the hand that was smiting him, and gather sweetness from that severity; nay, he would rejoice, that, though God did not the will of such a worth.

less and foolish creature as himself, yet he did his own will, and accomplished his own designs, which are infinitely more holy and wise.

THE DUTIES OF RELIGION ARE DELIGHTFUL TO HIM.

The exercises of religion, which to others are insipid and tedious, yield the highest pleasure and delight, to souls possessed with divine love: they rejoice, when they are called to "go up to the house of the Lord, that they may see his power and his glory, as they have formerly seen it in his sanctuary."* They never think themselves so happy, as, when, having retired from the world, and escaped from the noise and hurry of affairs, and silenced all their clamorous passions, those troublesome guests within, they have placed themselves in the presence of God, and entertain fellowship and communion with him: they delight to adore his perfections, and recount his favours; to protest their affection to him, and tell him a thousand times that they love him; to lay their troubles or wants before him, and disburthen their hearts in his bosom. Repentance itself is a delightful exercise, when it flows from the principle of love; there is a secret sweetness, which accompanies those tears of remorse, those meltings and relentings of a soul returning unto God, and lamenting its former unkindness.

The severities of a holy life, and that constant

* Psalm lxxiii. 2.

watch which we are obliged to keep over our hearts and ways, are very troublesome to those who are only ruled and actuated by an external law, and have no law in their minds, inclining them to the performance of their duty : but where divine love possesses the soul, it stands as sentinel to keep out every thing that may offend the beloved, and disdainfully repulses those temptations which assault it ; it complies cheerfully, not only with explicit commands, but with the most secret notices of the beloved's pleasure ; and is ingenious in discovering what will be most grateful and acceptable unto him : it makes mortification and self-denial change their harsh and dreadful names, and become easy, sweet, and delightful things.

But I find this part of my letter swell more than I designed ; indeed who would not be tempted to dwell on so pleasant a theme ? I shall, however, endeavour to make compensation, by brevity in the other points.

THE EXCELLENCY OF CHARITY.

The next branch of the divine life is an universal charity and love. The excellency of this grace will be easily acknowledged ; for what can be more noble and generous, than a heart enlarged to embrace the whole world ; whose wishes and designs are levelled at the good and welfare of the universe ; which considers every man's interest as its own ? He who loves his neighbour as himself, can never entertain any base or injurious thought, or

be wanting in expressions of bounty. He had rather suffer a thousand wrongs, than be guilty of one; and never accounts himself happy, but when some one or other has been benefited by him. The malice or ingratitude of men is not able to resist his love; he overlooks their injuries, and pities their folly, and overcomes their evil with good; and never designs any other revenge against his most bitter and malicious enemies, than to confer all the obligations he can upon them, whether they will or not. Is it any wonder that such a person is revered and admired, and accounted the darling of mankind? This inward goodness and benignity of spirit, reflects a certain sweetness and serenity upon the very countenance, and makes it amiable and lovely. It inspires the soul with a noble resolution and courage, and makes it capable of enterprizing and effecting the highest things. Those heroic actions which we are wont to read with admiration, have, for the most part, been the effect of the love of one's country, or of particular friendships; and certainly a more extensive and universal affection must be much more powerful and efficacious.

THE PLEASURE THAT ATTENDS IT.

Again, as *charity* flows from a noble and excellent temper, so it is accompanied with the greatest satisfaction and pleasure. It delights the soul to feel itself thus enlarged; to be delivered from those disquieting, as well as deformed passions,

malice, hatred, and envy; and to become gentle, sweet, and benign. Had I my choice of all things that might tend to my present felicity, I would pitch upon this, to have my heart possessed with the greatest kindness and affection towards all men in the world. I am sure, this would make me partake in all the happiness of others: their inward endowments, and outward prosperity, every thing that did benefit and advantage them, would afford me comfort and pleasure. And, though I should frequently meet with occasions of grief and compassion, yet, there is a sweetness in commiseration, which makes it infinitely more desirable than a stupid insensibility: and the consideration of that infinite goodness and wisdom which governs the world, might repress any excessive trouble for particular calamities that happen in it: and the hopes or possibility of men's after-happiness, might moderate their sorrow for their present misfortunes. Certainly, next to the love and enjoyment of God, that ardent charity and affection with which blessed souls embrace one another, is justly to be reckoned as the greatest felicity of those regions above; and, did it universally prevail in the world, it would anticipate that blessedness, and make us taste of the joys of heaven upon earth.

THE EXCELLENCY OF PURITY.

That which I named as a third branch of religion, was *purity*; and you may remember I described it to consist in a contempt of sensual

pleasures, and a resoluteness to undergo those troubles and pains with which we may meet, in the performance of our duty. Now, the naming of this, may suffice to recommend it, as a most noble and excellent quality. There is no slavery so base, as that whereby a man becomes a drudge to his own passions ; nor any victory so glorious, as that which is obtained over them. Never can that person be capable of any thing that is noble and worthy, who is sunk in the gross and feculent pleasures of sense, or bewitched with the light and airy gratifications of fancy : but the religious soul is of a more sublime and divine temper ; it knows it was made for higher things, and scorns to step aside one foot out of the way of holiness, for the obtaining any of these.

THE DELIGHT IT AFFORDS.

And this purity is accompanied with a great deal of pleasure : whatsoever defiles the soul, disturbs it too ; all impure delights have a sting in them, and leave smart and trouble behind them. Excess and intemperance, and all inordinate desires, are so much enemies to the health of the body, and the interests of this present life, that a little consideration might oblige any rational man to forbear them on that very score : and if religious persons go higher, and not only abstain from noxious pleasures, but neglect those that are innocent, this is not to be looked upon as any violent and uneasy restraint, but as the effect of better choice ;

their minds are taken up in the pursuit of more sublime and refined delights, and they cannot, therefore, be concerned in these. Any person that is engaged in a violent and passionate affection, will easily forget his ordinary gratifications; will be little curious about his diet, or his bodily ease, or the diversions he was wont to delight in. No wonder, then, if souls overpowered with divine love, despise inferior pleasures; and are almost ready to grudge the body its necessary attendance, for the common accommodations of life; judging all these impertinent to their main happiness, and to those higher enjoyments which they are pursuing. As for the hardships with which they may meet, they rejoice in them, as opportunities to exercise and testify their affection: and, since they are able to do so little for God, they are glad of the honour to suffer for him.

THE EXCELLENCY OF HUMILITY.

The last branch of religion is *humility*. And however, to vulgar and carnal eyes, this may appear an abject, base, and despicable quality, yet really, the soul of man is not capable of an higher and more noble endowment. It is a silly ignorance that begets pride: but humility arises from a nearer acquaintance with excellent things; which keeps men from doting on trifles, or admiring themselves because of some petty attainments. Noble and well-educated souls have no such high opinion of riches, beauty, strength, and other like

advantages, as to value themselves for them, or despise those that want them : and as for inward worth and real goodness, their sense of the divine perfections, makes them think very meanly of any thing they have hitherto attained ; still endeavouring to surmount themselves, and make nearer approaches to those infinite excellencies which they admire.

I know not what thoughts people may have of humility : but I see almost every person pretending to it, and shunning such expressions and actions, as may make them be accounted arrogant and presumptuous ; so that those who are most desirous of praise, will be loth to commend themselves. What are all those compliments and modes of civility, so frequent in our ordinary converse, but so many protestations of the esteem of others, and the low thoughts we have of ourselves ; and must not that humility be a noble and excellent endowment, when the very shadows of it are accounted so necessary a part of good breeding ? *

* ‘ It is now some years since I was engaged, unawares, in a conversation with a strong reasoner, who, at first, urged the wickedness of the American Indians, as a bar to our hope of converting them to Christianity. But when I mentioned their temperance, justice, and veracity (according to the accounts I had then received), it was asked, Why, if those heathens are such men as these, what will they gain by being made Christians ? What will they gain by being such Christians, as we see every where around us ? I could not deny, they would lose, not gain, by such a Christianity as this. Upon which she asked, Why, what else do you mean by Christianity ? My plain answer was, What do you apprehend to be more valuable, than good

THE PLEASURE AND SWEETNESS OF AN HUMBLE
TEMPER.

Again, this grace is accompanied with a great deal of happiness and tranquillity. The proud and arrogant person is a trouble to all that converse with him, but most of all to himself; every thing is enough to vex him; but scarce any thing sufficient to content and please him. He is ready to quarrel with every thing that falls out; as if he himself were such a considerable person, that God Almighty should do every thing to gratify him; and as if all the creatures of heaven and earth should wait upon him and obey his will. The leaves of high trees shake with every blast of wind; and every breath, every evil word, will disquiet and torment an arrogant man: but the humble person has this advantage when he is despised, that none can think more meanly of him than he thinks of himself; and therefore, he is not troubled at the matter, but can easily bear those reproaches which wound others to the soul. And as he is less affected with injuries, so indeed he is less

sense, good nature, and good manners? All these are contained, and that in the highest degree, in what I mean by Christianity. Good sense, so called, is but a poor dim shadow of what Christians call faith. Good nature, is only a faint distant resemblance of Christian charity. And good manners, if of the most finished kind that nature assisted by art can attain to, is but a dead picture of that holiness of conversation; which is the image of God visibly expressed. All these put together by the art of God, I call Christianity. Sir, if this be Christianity, said my opponent in amaze, I never saw a Christian in my life.' — *John Wesley's Works*, vol. xiv. p. 118. — Ed.

obnoxious unto them : “ contention which cometh of pride,” betrays a man into a thousand inconveniences, which those of a meek and lowly temper seldom meet with. True and genuine humility begets both a veneration and love, among all wise and discerning persons ; while pride defeats its own design, and deprives a man of that honour, to which it makes him pretend.

But, as the chief exercises of humility, are those which relate unto Almighty God ; so these are accompanied with the greatest satisfaction and sweetness. It is impossible to express the great pleasure and delight, which religious persons feel in the lowest prostrations of their soul before God, when, having a deep sense of the divine majesty and glory, they sink, if I may so speak, to the bottom of their beings, and vanish and disappear in the presence of God, by a serious and affectionate acknowledgment of their own nothingness, and the shortness and imperfections of their attainments ; when they understand the full sense and emphasis of the Psalmist’s exclamation, “ Lord, what is man ? ” and can utter it with the same affection. Never did any haughty and ambitious person receive the praises and applauses of men with so much pleasure, as the humble and religious renounce them : “ Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name, give the glory.”

Thus, I have spoken something of the excellencies and advantage of religion in its several branches ; but I should be very injurious to the

subject, did I pretend to have given any perfect account of it. Let us acquaint ourselves with it, my dear friend, let us acquaint ourselves with it, and experience will teach us more, than all that ever has been spoken or written concerning it. But, if we may suppose the soul to be already awakened unto some longing desires after so great a blessedness, it will be good to give them vent, and suffer them to issue forth in some such aspirations as these :

A PRAYER.

‘ Good God ! what a mighty felicity is this, to which we are called ! How graciously hast thou joined our duty and happiness together ; and prescribed that for our work, the performance whereof is a great reward ! And shall such silly worms be advanced to so great a height ? Wilt thou allow us to raise our eyes to thee ? Wilt thou admit and accept our affection ? Shall we receive the impression of thy divine excellencies, by beholding and admiring them, and partake of thy infinite blessedness and glory, by loving thee, and rejoicing in them ? O the happiness of those souls, that have broken the fetters of self-love, and disentangled their affection from every narrow and particular good ; whose understandings are enlightened by thy Holy Spirit, and their wills enlarged to the extent of thine ; who love thee above all things, and all mankind for thy sake ! I am persuaded, O God, I am persuaded, that I can never be happy,

till my carnal and corrupt affections be mortified ; till the pride and vanity of my spirit be subdued ; and till I come seriously to despise the world, and think nothing of myself. But O, when shall these things be ? O when wilt thou come unto me, and satisfy my soul with thy likeness, making me holy as thou art holy, even in all manner of conversation ? Hast thou given me a prospect of so great felicity, and wilt thou not bring me unto it ? Hast thou excited these desires in my soul, and wilt thou not also satisfy them ? O teach me to do thy will, for thou art my God : thy spirit is good, lead me unto the land of uprightness. Quicken me, O Lord, for thy name's sake, and perfect that which concerneth me. Thy mercy, O Lord, endureth for ever : forsake not the works of thine own hands.'

PART III.

THE DESPONDENT THOUGHTS OF SOME, NEWLY
AWAKENED TO A RIGHT SENSE OF THINGS.

I HAVE hitherto considered wherein true religion consists, and how desirable a thing it is. But when one sees how extremely distant the common temper and frame of men is from it, he may, perhaps, be ready to despond, and think it utterly impossible to be attained. He may sit down in sadness, and bemoan himself, and say in the anguish and bitterness of his spirit: ‘They are happy indeed, whose souls are awakened unto the divine life, who are thus renewed in the spirit of their minds. But, alas! I am quite of another constitution, and am not able to effect so mighty a change: if outward observances could have done the business, I might have hoped to acquit myself by diligence and care; but since nothing but a new nature can serve the turn, what am I able to do? I could bestow all my goods in oblations to God, or alms to the poor: but I cannot command that love and charity, without which this expense would profit me nothing. This gift of God cannot be purchased with money; * if a man should give all the substance of his house for love, it would

* Acts, viii. 20.

utterly be contemned.* I could pine and macerate my body, and undergo many hardships and troubles; but I cannot get all my corruptions starved, nor my affections wholly weaned from earthly things. There are still some worldly desires lurking in my heart; and those vanities which I have shut out of the doors, are always getting in by the windows. I am, frequently, convinced of my own meanness, of the weakness of my body, and the far greater weakness of my soul: but this rather begets indignation and discontent, than true humility in my spirit; and, though I should come to think meanly of myself, yet I cannot endure that others should think so too. In a word, when I reflect on my highest and most specious attainments, I have reason to suspect, that they are all but the effects of nature, the issues of self-love acting under several disguises: and this principle is so powerful, and so deeply rooted in me, that I can never hope to be delivered from the dominion of it. I may toss and turn as a door on the hinges, but can never be clear off, or be quite unhinged of *self*, which is still the centre of all my motions. So that, all the advantage which I can draw from the discovery of religion, is but to see, at a vast distance, that felicity which I am not able to reach: like a man in a shipwreck, who discerns the land, and envies the happiness of those who are there, but thinks it impossible for himself to get ashore.'

* Cant. viii. 7.

THE UNREASONABLENESS OF THESE FEARS.

These, or such desponding thoughts, may arise in the minds of those persons, who begin to conceive somewhat more of the nature and excellency of religion than before. They have spied the land, and seen that it is exceeding good; that it floweth with milk and honey: but they find they have the children of Anak to grapple with; many powerful appetites and corruptions to overcome, and they fear they shall never prevail against them. But why should we give way to such discouraging suggestions? Why should we entertain such unreasonable fears, which damp our spirits, and weaken our hands, and augment the difficulties of our way? Let us encourage ourselves, my dear friend, let us encourage ourselves, with those mighty aids, which we are to expect in this spiritual warfare; for greater is he that is for us, than all that can rise against us: “The eternal God is our refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms.”* — “Let us be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might; for he it is, that shall tread down our enemies.” God has a tender regard for the souls of men, and is infinitely willing to promote their welfare. He has condescended to our weakness, and declared with an oath, that he has no pleasure in our destruction. There is no such thing as despite or envy lodged in the bosom of that ever blessed

* Deut. xxxiii. 27.

being, whose name and nature is love. He created us, at first, in a happy condition; and now, when we are fallen from it, “he hath laid help upon one that is mighty to save,”* hath committed the care of our souls to no meaner person, than the eternal Son of his love. It is he that is the Captain of our salvation; and what enemies can be too strong for us, when we are fighting under his banners? Did not the Son of God come down from the bosom of his Father, and pitch his tabernacle amongst the sons of men, that he might recover and propagate the divine life, and restore the image of God in their souls? All the mighty works which he performed; all the afflictions which he sustained, had this for their scope and design; for this, did he labour and toil; for this, did he bleed and die: “He was with child; he was in pain, and hath he brought forth nothing but wind? Hath he wrought no deliverance in the earth?† Shall he not see the travail of his soul?”‡ Certainly it is impossible, that this great contrivance of heaven should prove abortive; that such a mighty undertaking should fail and miscarry. It has already been effectual for the salvation of many thousands, who were once as far from the kingdom of heaven, as we can suppose ourselves to be; and our “High Priest continueth for ever, and is able to save them to the uttermost,

* Psalm lxxxix. 19.

† Isaiah, xxvi. 9.

‡ Isaiah, liii. 11.

that come unto God by him.”* He is tender and compassionate ; he knows our infirmities, and had experience of our temptations : “ A bruised reed will he not break, and smoking flax will he not quench, till he send forth judgment unto victory.”† He has sent out his Holy Spirit, whose sweet, but powerful breathings are still moving up and down in the world, to quicken and revive the souls of men, and awaken them unto the sense and feeling of those divine things for which they were made ; which is ready to assist such weak and languishing creatures as we are, in our essays towards holiness and felicity ; and which, when once it hath taken hold of a soul, and kindled in it the smallest spark of divine love, will be sure to preserve and cherish, and bring it forth into a flame, which many waters shall not quench, neither shall the floods be able to drown it.‡ Whenever this day begins to dawn, and this “ day-star to arise in the heart,”§ it will easily dispel the powers of darkness, and make ignorance and folly, and all the corrupt and selfish affections of men, flee away before it, as fast, as the shades of night when the sun cometh out of his chambers : for “ the path of the just is as the shining light, which shineth, more and more, unto the perfect day.”|| — “ They shall go on from strength to strength, till every one of them appear before God in Zion.”¶

* Heb. vii. 24, 25.

† Cant. viii. 7.

|| Prov. iv. 18.

† Matt. xii. 20.

§ 2 Pet. i. 19.

¶ Psalm lxxxvi. 7.

Why should we think it impossible, that true goodness and universal love should ever come to sway and prevail in our souls? Is not this their primitive state and condition; their native and genuine constitution, as they came first from the hands of their Maker? Sin and corruption are but usurpers; and, though they have long kept the possession, yet “from the beginning it was not so.” That inordinate self-love, which one would think were rooted in our very being, and interwoven with the constitution of our nature, is, nevertheless, of foreign extraction, and had no place at all in the state of integrity. We have still so much reason left, as to condemn it. Our understandings are easily convinced, that we ought to be wholly devoted to Him, from whom we have our being; and to love him, infinitely more than ourselves, who is infinitely better than we; and our wills would readily comply with this, if they were not disordered and put out of tune. And is not he who made our souls, able to rectify and mend them again? Shall we not be able, by his assistance, to vanquish and expel those violent intruders, “and turn unto flight the armies of the aliens?”*

No sooner shall we take up arms in this holy war, but we shall have all the saints on earth, and all the angels in heaven, engaged on our party. The holy church throughout the world, is daily interceding with God, for the success of all such en-

* Heb. xi. 34.

deavours; and, doubtless, those heavenly hosts above, are nearly concerned in the interests of religion, and infinitely desirous to see the divine life thriving and prevailing in this inferior world; and the will of God done by us on earth, as it is done by themselves in heaven: may we not then encourage ourselves, as the prophet did his servant, when he showed him the horses and chariots of fire: “Fear not, for they that be with us, are more than they that be against us.”*

WE MUST DO WHAT WE CAN, AND DEPEND ON
THE DIVINE ASSISTANCE.

Away, then, with all perplexing fears and desponding thoughts. To undertake vigorously, and rely confidently on the divine assistance, is more than half the conquest: “Let us arise and be doing, and the Lord will be with us.”† It is true, religion in the souls of men, is the immediate work of God; and all our natural endeavours can neither produce it alone, nor merit those supernatural aids by which it must be wrought: the Holy Ghost must come upon us, and the power of the Highest must overshadow us, before that holy thing can be begotten, and Christ formed within us. But yet, we must not expect that this whole work shall be done, without any concurring endeavours of our own: we must not lie loitering in the ditch, and wait till omnipotence pulls us from

* 2 Kings, vi. 16, 17.

† 1 Chron. xxii. 16.

thence. No, no; we must bestir ourselves, and actuate those powers which we have already received: we must put forth ourselves to our uttermost capacities, and then we may hope that “our labour shall not be in vain in the Lord.”* All the art and industry of man cannot form the smallest herb, or make a stalk of corn to grow in the field: it is the energy of nature, and the influences of heaven, which produce this effect; it is God “who causeth the grass to grow, and herb for the service of man:”† and yet nobody will say, that the labours of the husbandman are useless or unnecessary. So, likewise, the human soul is immediately created by God; it is he who both forms and enlivens the child: and yet he has appointed the marriage-bed, as the ordinary means for the propagation of mankind. Though there must intervene a stroke of omnipotence to effect this mighty change in our souls, yet ought we to do what we can to fit and prepare ourselves. For we must break up our fallow ground, and root out the weeds, and pull up the thorns,‡ that so we may be more ready to receive the seeds of grace, and the dew of heaven. It is true, God has been found of some, who sought him not; he has cast himself in their way, who were quite out of his; he has laid hold upon them, and stopped their course on a sudden: thus was Saint Paul converted, in his journey to Damascus. But, certainly, this is not God’s ordinary method of

* 1 Cor. xv. 58.

† Psalm civ. 14.

‡ Jer. iv. 3.

dealing with men. Though he has not tied himself to means, yet he has tied us to the use of them; and we have never more reason to expect the divine assistance, than when we are doing our utmost endeavours. It shall, therefore, be my next work, to show what course we ought to take, for attaining that blessed temper which I have been hitherto describing. But here, if, in delivering my own thoughts, I shall chance to differ from what is, or may be, said by others in this matter, I would not be thought to contradict and oppose them, more than physicians do, when they prescribe several remedies for the same disease, which, perhaps, are all useful and good. Every one may propose the method he judges most proper and convenient; but he does not thereby pretend that the cure can never be effected, unless that method be exactly observed. I doubt, it has occasioned much unnecessary disquietude to some holy persons, that they have not found such a regular and orderly transaction in their souls, as they have seen described in books; that they have not passed through all those steps and stages of conversion, which some (who perhaps have felt them in themselves) have too peremptorily prescribed to others. God has several ways of dealing with the souls of men; and it suffices if the work be accomplished, whatever the methods have been.

Again, though, in proposing directions, I must follow that order which the nature of things shall suggest; yet I do not mean, that the same method

should be so punctually observed in the practice, as if the latter rules were never to be heeded, till some considerable time have been spent in practising the former. The directions which I intend, are mutually conducive one to another; and are all to be performed, as occasion shall serve, and as we find ourselves enabled to perform them.

WE MUST SHUN ALL MANNER OF SIN.

But, if we desire to have our souls moulded to this holy frame, to become partakers of the divine nature, and to have Christ formed in our hearts, we must seriously resolve, and carefully endeavour, to avoid and abandon all vicious and sinful practices. There can be no treaty of peace, till we lay down those weapons of rebellion with which we fight against heaven; nor can we expect to have our distempers cured, if our daily food be poison. Every wilful sin gives a mortal wound to the soul, and removes it to a greater distance from God and goodness; and we can never hope to have our hearts purified from corrupt affections, unless we cleanse our hands from vicious actions. Now, in this case, we cannot excuse ourselves by the pretence of impossibility; for surely our outward man is some way in our power; we have some command of our feet, and hands, and tongue, nay, and of our thoughts and fancies too; at least, so far, as to divert them from impure and sinful objects, and to turn our mind another way: and we should find this power and authority much

strengthened and advanced, if we were careful to manage and exercise it. In the mean while, I acknowledge our corruptions are so strong, and our temptations so many, that it will require a great deal of stedfastness and resolution, of watchfulness and care, to preserve ourselves, even in this degree of innocence and purity.

WE MUST KNOW WHAT THINGS ARE SINFUL.

And first, let us inform ourselves well, what those sins are, from which we ought to abstain. And here we must not take our measures from the maxims of the world, or from the practices of those, whom, in charity, we account good men. Most people have very light apprehensions of these things, and are not sensible of any fault, unless it be gross and flagitious: and scarcely reckon any crime so great, as that which they call preciseness: and those who are more serious, allow themselves, many times, too great latitude and freedom. Alas! how much pride and vanity, and passion and humour, how much weakness, and folly, and sin, every day shows itself, in our converse and behaviour. It may be they are humbled for it, and striving against it, and are daily gaining some ground; but then, the progress is so small, and their failings so many, that we had need to chuse an exacter pattern. Every one of us must answer for himself; and the practices of others will never warrant and secure us. It is the highest folly, to regulate our actions by any other standard, than

that by which they must be judged. If ever we would “cleanse our way,” it must be “by taking heed thereunto, according to the word of God.” * And that “word, which is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart,” † will certainly discover many things to be sinful and heinous, which pass for very innocent in the eyes of the world. Let us, therefore, imitate the Psalmist, who says, concerning the works of men, “by the words of thy lips, I have kept myself from the paths of the destroyer.” ‡ Let us acquaint ourselves well, with the strict and holy laws of our religion ; let us consider the discourses of our blessed Saviour (especially that divine sermon on the mount), and the writings of his holy apostles, where an ingenuous and unbiassed mind may clearly discern those limits and bounds, by which our actions ought to be confined. And then, let us never look upon any sin as light and inconsiderable ; but be fully persuaded, that the smallest, is infinitely heinous in the sight of God, and prejudicial to the souls of men ; and that, if we had a right sense of things, we should be as deeply affected with the least irregularities, as now we are with the highest crimes.

* Psalm cxix. 9.

† Heb. iv. 12.

‡ Psalm xvii. 4.

WE MUST RESIST THE TEMPTATIONS TO SIN, BY
CONSIDERING THE EVILS THEY WILL DRAW
ON US.

But, amongst those things which we discover to be sinful, there will be some, unto which, through the disposition of our nature, or long custom, or the endearments of pleasure, we are so much wedded, that it will be like cutting off the right hand, or pulling out the right eye, to abandon them. But, must we therefore sit down, and wait till all difficulties be over, and every temptation be gone? This were to imitate the fool in the poet, who stood the whole day at the river side, till all the waters should run by.* We must not indulge our inclinations, as we do little children, till they grow weary of the thing which they are unwilling to let go; we must not continue our sinful practices, in hopes that the divine grace will one day overpower our spirits, and make us hate them for their own deformity.

Let us suppose the worst; that we are utterly destitute of any supernatural principle, and want that taste, by which we should discern and abhor perverse things: yet surely we are capable of some considerations, which may be of force to persuade us, to this reformation of our lives. If the inward deformity, and heinous nature of sin, cannot affect

* ‘ Qui recte vivendi prorogat horam,
Rusticus expectat dum defluat amnis; at ille
Labitur, et labetur in omne volubilis ævum.’

HORAT. *Epist* I. ii. 41.— *Ed.*

us, at least we may be frightened by those dreadful consequences which attend it: that same selfish principle which urges us forward unto the pursuit of sinful pleasures, will make us loth to buy them at the rate of everlasting misery. Thus we may encounter self-love with its own weapons; and employ one natural inclination, for repressing the exorbitances of another. Let us, therefore, accustom ourselves to consider seriously, what a fearful thing it must needs be to irritate and offend that infinite Being, on whom we depend every moment; who needs but withdraw his mercies, to make us miserable, or his assistance, to make us nothing. Let us frequently remember the shortness and uncertainty of our lives; and how, after we have taken a few turns more in the world, and conversed a little longer among men, we must all go down unto the dark and silent grave, and carry nothing along with us, but anguish and regret for all our sinful enjoyments; and then, think what horror must needs seize the guilty soul, to find itself naked and alone, before the severe and impartial Judge of the world, to render an exact account, not only of its more important and considerable transactions, but of every word that the tongue has uttered, and of the swiftest and most secret thoughts that have ever passed through the mind. Let us sometimes represent unto ourselves the terrors of that dreadful day,* when the foundations of the

* 2 Pet. iii. 10.

earth shall be shaken, and the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, and the present frame of nature shall be dissolved, and our eyes shall see the blessed Jesus, (who came once into the world, in all humility, to visit us, to purchase pardon for us, and beseech us to accept of it,) now appearing in the majesty of his glory, and descending from heaven in a flaming fire, to take vengeance on those who have despised his mercy, and persisted in rebellion against him: when all the hidden things of darkness shall be brought to light, and the counsels of all hearts shall be made manifest: * when those secret impurities and subtile frauds, whereof the world never suspected us, shall be exposed and laid open to public view, and many thousand actions, which we never dreamed to be sinful, or else had altogether forgotten, shall be charged home upon our conscience, with such evident conviction of guilt, that we shall be able neither to deny nor excuse them. Then shall all the angels in heaven, and all the saints that ever lived on earth, approve that dreadful sentence which shall be passed on wicked men: and those who perhaps loved and esteemed them when they lived in the world, shall look upon them with indignation and abhorrence, and never make one request for their deliverance. Let us consider the eternal punishment of damned souls, which are shadowed forth

* 1 Cor. iv. 5.

in Scripture, by metaphors taken from those things that are most terrible and grievous in the world, and yet all insufficient, to convey any full apprehension of them to our mind. When we have joined together the import of all these expressions, and added to them whatever our fancy can conceive of misery and torment, we must still remember, that all this comes infinitely short of the truth and reality of the thing.

It is true, this is a sad and melancholy subject, there is anguish and horror in the consideration of it; but surely it must be infinitely more dreadful to endure it? And such thoughts as these, may be very useful to fright us from the courses, which would lead us thither: how fond soever we may be of sinful pleasures, the fear of hell would make us abstain; our most forward inclinations will startle and give back, when pressed with that question in the prophet: "Who amongst us can dwell with everlasting burnings?" *

To this very purpose it is, that the terrors of another world are so frequently represented in holy writ; and that, in such terms as are most proper to affect and influence a carnal mind. These fears can never suffice, to make any person truly good; but, certainly, they may restrain us from much evil, and have often made way for more ingenuous and kindly impressions.

* Isaiah, xxxiii. 14.

WE MUST KEEP A CONSTANT WATCH OVER
OURSELVES.

But it will not suffice to consider these things once and again; nor to form some resolutions of abandoning our sins, unless we maintain a constant guard, and continual watch over them. Sometimes the mind is awakened to see the dismal consequences of a vicious life, and straight we are resolved to reform: but alas! it presently falls asleep, and we lose that prospect which we had of things, and then temptations take the advantage; they solicit and importune us continually, and frequently engage our consent, before we are aware. It is the folly and ruin of most people, to live at peradventure, and to take part in every thing that comes in their way; seldom considering what they are about to say or do. If we would have our resolutions take effect, we must take heed unto our ways, and set a watch before the door of our lips, and examine the motions that arise in our hearts, and cause them to tell us whence they come, and whither they go; whether it be pride or passion, or any corrupt and vicious humour, that prompts us to any design; and whether God will be offended, or any body harmed by it. And, if we have no time for long reasonings, let us, at least, turn our eyes towards God, and place ourselves in his presence, to ask his leave and approbation for what we do: let us consider ourselves under the all-seeing eye of that divine

Majesty, as in the midst of an infinite globe of light, which compasseth us about both behind and before, and pierceth to the innermost corners of our souls. The sense and remembrance of the divine presence, is the most ready and effectual means, both to discover what is unlawful, and to restrain us from it. There are some things which a person could make shift to palliate or defend, and yet he dares not look Almighty God in the face, and adventure upon them. If we look unto him, we shall be enlightened; if we “set him always before us, he will guide us by his eye, and instruct us in the way wherein we ought to walk.”

WE MUST OFTEN EXAMINE OUR ACTIONS.

This care and watchfulness over our actions, must be seconded by frequent and serious reflections upon them; not only, that we may obtain the divine mercy and pardon for our sins, by an humble and sorrowful acknowledgment of them, — but also, that we may reinforce and strengthen our resolutions, and learn to decline or resist the temptations, by which we have been formerly foiled. It is an advice worthy of a Christian, though it first dropped from a heathen pen: ‘That, before we betake ourselves to rest, we review and examine all the passages of the day; that we may have the comfort of what we have done aright, and may redress what we find to have been amiss, and make the shipwrecks of one day, be as marks to direct

our course in another.’* This may be called the very art of virtuous living, and would contribute wonderfully to advance our reformation, and preserve our innocency. But, withal, we must not forget to implore the divine assistance; especially against those sins that most easily beset us: and, though it be supposed that our hearts are not yet moulded into that spiritual frame, which should render our devotions acceptable, — yet, methinks, such considerations as have been proposed to deter us from sin, may also stir us up to some natural seriousness, and make our prayers against it as earnest, at least, as they are wont to be against other calamities: and I doubt not but God, who heareth the cry of the ravens, will have some regard even to such petitions as proceed from those natural passions which himself hath implanted in us. Besides, those prayers against sin, will be powerful engagements on ourselves, to excite us to watchfulness and care; and common ingenuousness will make us ashamed to relapse into those faults, which we have lately bewailed before God, and against which we have begged his assistance.

- * “ Each night, ere needful slumber seal thine eyes,
Home to thy soul let these reflections rise :
How has this day my duty seen express’d ?
What have I done, omitted, or transgress’d ?
Then grieve the moments thou hast idly spent :
The rest will yield thee comfort and content.”

Golden Verses of Pythagoras. — Ed.

IT IS FIT TO RESTRAIN OURSELVES IN MANY
LAWFUL THINGS.

Thus are we to make the first essay for recovering the divine life, by restraining the natural inclinations, that they break not out into sinful practices. But I must add, that Christian prudence will teach us to abstain from gratifications that are not simply unlawful. And that, not only that we may secure our innocence, which would be in continual hazard if we should strain our liberty to the utmost point, — but also, that hereby we may weaken the forces of nature, and teach our appetites to obey. We must do with ourselves, as prudent parents with their children; who cross their wills in many little indifferent things, to make them manageable and submissive in more considerable instances. He who would mortify the pride and vanity of his spirit, should stop his ears to the most deserved praises; and sometimes forbear his just vindication from the censures and aspersions of others, especially, if they reflect only upon his prudence and conduct, and not on his virtue and innocence. He who would check a revengeful humour, will do well to deny himself the satisfaction of representing unto others, the injuries which he has sustained; and if we would so take heed to our ways, that we sin not with our tongue, we must accustom ourselves much to solitude and silence, and sometimes, with the Psalmist, hold our peace even from good, till we have obtained

some command over that unruly member. Thus, I say, we may bind up our natural inclinations, and make our appetites more moderate in their cravings, by accustoming them to frequent refusals : but it is not enough to have them under violence and restraint.

WE MUST STRIVE TO PUT OURSELVES OUT OF LOVE
WITH THE WORLD.

Our next essay must be to wean our affections from created things, and from all the delights and entertainments of the lower life ; which sink and depress the souls of men, and retard their motions towards God and heaven. And this we must do, by possessing our minds with a deep persuasion of the vanity and emptiness of worldly enjoyments. This is an ordinary theme, and every body can make declamations upon it. But alas ! how few understand and believe what they say ? These notions float in our brains, and come sliding off our tongues, but we have no deep impression of them on our spirits. We feel not the truth, which we pretend to believe. We can tell, that all the glory and splendour, all the pleasures and enjoyments, of the world, are vanity and nothing : and yet these nothings take up all our thoughts, and engross all our affections ; they stifle the better inclinations of our soul, and inveigle us into many a sin. It may be, in a sober mood, we give them the slight, and resolve to be no longer deluded with them : but these thoughts seldom outlive the

next temptation ; the vanities which we have shut out at the door, get in at a postern ; there are still some pretensions, some hopes that flatter us ; and, after we have been frustrated a thousand times, we must continually be repeating the experiment : the least difference of circumstances is enough to delude us, and make us expect that satisfaction in one thing, which we have missed in another ; but, could we once come to a real and serious contempt of worldly things, this were a very considerable advancement in our way. The soul of man is of a vigorous and active nature, and has in it a raging and inextinguishable thirst, an immaterial kind of fire, always catching at some object or other, in conjunction with which it expects to be happy ; and, were it once rent from the world, and from all the bewitching enjoyments under the sun, it would quickly search after some higher and more excellent object, to satisfy its ardent and importunate cravings ; and, being no longer dazzled with glittering vanities, it would fix on that supreme and all-sufficient good, where it would discover such beauty and sweetness, as would charm and overpower all its affections. The love of the world, and the love of God, are like the scales of a balance ; as the one falls, the other rises : when our natural inclinations prosper, and the creature is exalted in our soul, religion is faint, and languishes ; but when earthly objects wither away, and lose their beauty, and when the soul begins to flag in its prosecution of them, then the seeds of

X grace take root, and the divine life begins to flourish and prevail. It, therefore, nearly concerns us, to convince ourselves of the emptiness and vanity of creature-enjoyments, and to reason our hearts out of love with them: let us seriously consider all that our reason, or our faith, our own experience, or the observations of others, can suggest to this effect; let us ponder the matter over and over, and fix our thoughts on this truth, till we become really persuaded of it. Amidst all our pursuits and designs, let us stop and ask ourselves, For what end is all this? At what do I aim? Can the gross and muddy pleasures of sense, or a heap of white and yellow earth, or the esteem and affection of silly creatures like myself, satisfy a rational and immortal soul? Have I not tried these things already? Will they have a higher relish, and yield me more contentment to-morrow than yesterday; or the next year, than they did the last? There may be some little difference between that which I am now pursuing, and that which I enjoyed before; but sure my former enjoyments appeared as pleasant, and promised as fair, before I attained them; like the rainbow, they look very glorious at a distance, but when I approached, I found nothing but emptiness and vapour.* O

* " As yon summits soft and fair,
 Clad in colours of the air,
 Which, to those who journey near,
 Barren, brown, and rough appear:
 Still we tread the same coarse way;
 The present's still a cloudy day."— *Dyer.* — ED.

what a poor thing would the life of man be, if it were capable of no higher enjoyments!

I cannot insist on this subject, and there is the less need, when I remember to whom I am writing. Yes, my dear friend, you have had as great experience of the emptiness and vanity of human things, and have at present as few worldly engagements, as any that I know. I have sometimes reflected on those passages of your life, with which you have been pleased to acquaint me; and, methinks, through all, I can discern a design of the divine Providence, to wean your affections from every thing here below. The trials which you have had of those things which the world doats upon, have taught you to despise them; and you have found by experience, that neither the endowments of nature, nor the advantages of fortune, are sufficient for happiness; that every rose has its thorn, and there may be a worm at the root of the fairest gourd; some secret and undiscerned grief, which may make a person deserve the pity of those, who, perhaps, admire or envy their supposed felicity. If any earthly comforts have got too much of your heart, I think they have been your relations and friends; and the dearest of these are removed out of the world, so that, when you would think upon them, you must raise your mind towards heaven. Thus God has provided, that your heart may be loosed from the world, and that he may not have any rival in your affection; which I have always observed to be so large and unbounded, so noble

and disinterested, that no inferior object can answer or deserve it.

WE MUST DO THOSE OUTWARD ACTIONS THAT ARE
COMMANDED.

When we have got our corruptions restrained, and our natural appetites and inclinations towards worldly things in some measure subdued, we must proceed to such exercises, as have a more immediate tendency to excite and awaken the divine life. And first, let us endeavour conscientiously to perform those duties, which religion requires, and to which it would incline us, if it prevailed in our souls. If we cannot get our inward disposition presently changed, let us study, at least, to regulate our outward deportment. If our hearts be not yet inflamed with divine love, let us, however, own our allegiance to that infinite Majesty, by attending his service, and listening to his word; by speaking reverently of his name, and praising his goodness, and exhorting others to serve and obey him. If we want that charity, and those bowels of compassion, which we ought to have towards our neighbours, yet must we not omit any occasion of doing them good. If our hearts be haughty and proud, we must, nevertheless, study a modest and humble deportment. These external performances are of little value in themselves, but they may help us forward to better things. The apostle, indeed, tells us, that bodily exercise profiteth little; but he seems not to affirm that it is

altogether useless. It is always good to be doing what we can, for then God is wont to pity our weakness, and assist our feeble endeavours. And when true charity and humility, and other graces of the divine Spirit, come to take root in our souls, they will exert themselves more freely, and with less difficulty, if we have before been accustomed to express them in our outward conversation. Nor need we fear the imputation of hypocrisy, though our actions do thus somewhat outrun our affections: since they still proceed from a sense of our duty; and since our design is, not to appear better than we are, but, that we may really become so.

WE MUST ENDEAVOUR TO FORM INTERNAL ACTS OF
DEVOTION, CHARITY, ETC.

But as inward acts have a more immediate influence on the soul, to mould it to a right temper and frame, so ought we to be most frequent and sedulous in the exercise of them. Let us be often lifting up our hearts towards God; and, if we do not say, that we love him above all things, let us at least acknowledge, that it is our duty, and would be our happiness, to do so: let us lament the dishonour done to him by foolish and sinful men, and applaud the praises and adorations that are given him, by that blessed and glorious company above: let us resign and yield ourselves up unto him a thousand times, to be governed by his laws, and disposed of at his pleasure. And, though our stubborn hearts should start back and refuse, yet

let us tell him we are convinced that his will is always just and good ; and let us, therefore, desire him to do with us whatsoever he pleaseth, whether we will or not. And so, in order to beget in us an universal charity towards men, we must be frequently putting up wishes for their happiness, and blessing every person that we see. And when we have done any thing for the relief of the miserable, we may second it with earnest desires, that God would take care of them, and deliver them out of all their distresses.

Thus should we exercise ourselves unto godliness. And when we are employing the powers that we have, the Spirit of God is wont to interfere, and elevate these acts of our soul beyond the pitch of nature, and give them a divine impression : and, after the frequent reiteration of these, we shall find ourselves more inclined unto them ; they flowing with greater freedom and ease.

CONSIDERATION A GREAT INSTRUMENT OF RELIGION.

I shall mention but two other means for begetting that holy and divine temper of spirit, which is the subject of the present discourse. And the first is, a deep and serious consideration of the truths of our religion ; and that, both as to their certainty, and importance. The assent which is ordinarily given to divine truths, is very faint and languid ; very weak and ineffectual ; flowing only from a blind inclination to follow that religion which is in fashion, or from a lazy indifference and

unconcernedness whether things be so or not. Men are unwilling to quarrel with the religion of their country ; and, since all their neighbours are Christians, they are content to be so too. But they are seldom at the pains to consider the evidences of those truths, or to ponder the importance and tendency of them ; and hence it is, that they have so little influence on their affections and practice. Those *spiritless and paralytic thoughts* (as one rightly terms them), are not able to move the will and direct the hand. We must, therefore, endeavour to work up our minds to a serious belief, and full persuasion, of divine truths ; to a sense and feeling of spiritual things. Our thoughts must dwell upon them, till we are both convinced of them, and deeply affected by them. Let us urge forward our spirits, and make them approach the invisible world. Let us fix our minds upon immaterial things, till we clearly perceive that they are no dreams ; nay, that all things, besides them, are but dreams and shadows. When we look about us, and behold the beauty and magnificence of this goodly frame, the order and harmony of the whole creation, — let our thoughts, from thence, take their flight towards that omnipotent wisdom and goodness, which first produced, and which still establishes and upholds them. When we reflect upon ourselves, let us consider that we are not a mere piece of organized matter ; a curious and well contrived engine : that there is more in us, than flesh, blood, and bones ; even a divine spark, capable of knowing, and loving,

and enjoying our Maker: and, though it be now exceedingly clogged with its dull and lumpish companion, yet ere long it shall be delivered; and shall subsist without the body, as well as the body can do without the clothes, which we throw off at our pleasure. Let us often withdraw our thoughts from this earth; this scene of misery, folly, and sin: and let us raise them towards that more vast and glorious world, whose innocent and blessed inhabitants solace themselves eternally in the divine presence, and know no other passion, but an unmixed joy, and an unbounded love. Let us consider, how the blessed Son of God came down to this lower world, to live among us, and to die for us, that he might bring us to a portion of the same felicity; and let us think, how he hath overcome the sharpness of death, and opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers, and is now set down on the “right hand of the Majesty on high*,”—and yet, is not the less mindful of us, but receives our prayers, and presents them to his Father; and is daily visiting his church with the influences of his Spirit, as the sun reacheth us with his beams.

TO BEGET DIVINE LOVE, WE MUST CONSIDER THE
EXCELLENCY OF THE DIVINE NATURE.

The serious and frequent consideration of these, and such divine truths, is the most proper method to beget that lively faith, which is the foundation

* Heb. i. 3.

of religion, the spring and root of the divine life. Let me further suggest some particular subjects of meditation, for producing the several branches of it. And, first, to enflame our souls with the love of God, let us consider the excellency of his nature, and his love and kindness towards us. It is little we know of the divine perfection, and yet, that little may suffice to fill our souls with admiration and love; to ravish our affections, as well as to raise our wonder. For we are not merely creatures of sense, that we should be incapable of any other affection, except that which enters by the eyes. The character of an excellent person, whom we have never seen, will many times engage our hearts, and make us greatly concerned in all his interests. And what is it, I pray you, that engages us so much, to those with whom we converse? I cannot think, that it is merely the colour of their face, or their comely proportions; for then we should fall in love with statues, and pictures, and flowers. These outward accomplishments may a little delight the eye, but would never be able to prevail so much on the heart, if they did not represent some vital perfection. We either see or apprehend, some greatness of mind, or vigour of spirit, or sweetness of disposition; some sprightliness, or wisdom, or goodness, which charms our spirit, and commands our love. Now, these perfections are not obvious to the sight; the eyes can only discern their signs and effects; and, if it be the understanding that directs the affection, and vital

perfections prevail with it, certainly the excellencies of the divine nature (the traces of which we cannot but discover in every thing we behold), would not fail to engage our hearts, if we seriously viewed and regarded them. Shall we not be infinitely more transported with that almighty wisdom and goodness, which fills the universe, and displays itself in all the parts of creation ; which establishes the frame of nature, and turns the mighty wheels of Providence, and keeps the world from disorder and ruin, — than with the faint rays of the same perfections, which we meet with in our fellow-creatures? Shall we doat on the scattered pieces of a rude and imperfect picture, and never be affected with the original beauty? This were an unaccountable stupidity and blindness. Whatever we find lovely in a friend, or in a saint, ought not to engross, but elevate our affection. We should conclude with ourselves, that if there be so much sweetness in a drop, there must be infinitely more in the fountain; if there be so much splendour in a ray, what must the sun be in its glory?

Nor can we pretend the remoteness of the object, as if God were at too great a distance for our converse or our love: “He is not far from every one of us: for in him we live, and move, and have our being.”* We cannot open our eyes, but we must behold some footsteps of his glory; and cannot turn them towards him, but we shall be sure to

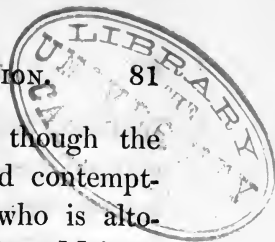
* Acts, xvii. 27.

find his, intent upon us; waiting, as it were, to catch a look, ready to entertain with us, the most intimate fellowship and communion. Let us, therefore, endeavour to raise our minds to the clearest conceptions of the divine nature. Let us consider, all that his works declare, or his word discovers, of him unto us; and let us, especially, contemplate that visible representation of him, which was made in our own nature by his Son; who was the “brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person*,” and who appeared in the world to discover, at once what God is, and what we ought to be. Let us represent him to our minds, as we find him described in the Gospel; and there we shall behold the perfections of the divine nature, though covered with the veil of human infirmities; and, when we have framed unto ourselves the clearest notion that we can, of a being, infinite in power, in wisdom, and goodness, the author and fountain of all perfections,—let us fix the eyes of our soul upon it†, that our eyes may affect our heart, and while we are musing the fire will burn.‡

WE SHOULD MEDITATE ON GOD’S GOODNESS AND
LOVE.

Especially, if hereunto we add the consideration of God’s favour and good-will towards us: nothing is more powerful to engage our affection, than to find that we are beloved. Expressions of kindness

* Heb. i. 3. † Lam. iii. 51. ‡ Psalm xxxix. 31.



are always pleasing and acceptable, though the person should be otherwise mean and contemptible: but, to have the love of One who is altogether lovely, to know that the glorious Majesty of heaven hath any regard unto us, how must it astonish and delight us. How must it overcome our spirits and melt our hearts, and put our whole soul into a flame! Now, as the word of God is full of the expressions of his love towards man, so, all his works most loudly proclaim it; he gave us our being, and, by preserving us in being, renews the donation every moment. He has placed us in a rich and well-furnished world, and liberally provided for all our necessities; he rains down blessings from heaven upon us, and causes the earth to bring forth our provision; he gives us our food and raiment, and, while we are spending the productions of one year, he is preparing for us, against another. He sweetens our lives with innumerable comforts, and gratifies every faculty with suitable objects; the eye of his providence is always upon us, and he watches for our safety when we are fast asleep, neither minding him nor ourselves. But, lest we should think these testimonies of his kindness less considerable, because they are the easy issues of his omnipotent power, and do not put him to any trouble or pain,—he has taken a more wonderful method to endear himself to us; he has testified his affection to us, by suffering as well as by doing; and, because he could not suffer in his own nature, he assumed ours. The eternal Son of God

clothed himself with the infirmities of our flesh, and left the company of those innocent and blessed spirits, who knew well how to love and adore him, that he might dwell among men, and wrestle with the obstinacy of that rebellious race, to reduce them to their allegiance and felicity, and then to offer himself up as a sacrifice and propitiation for them. I remember one of the poets has an ingenious fancy to express the passion, by which, after a long resistance, he found himself overcome : ‘ That the god of love had shot all his golden arrows at him, but could never pierce his heart ; till, at length, he put himself into the bow, and darted himself straight into his breast.’* Methinks, this, in some measure, adumbrates God’s method of dealing with men. He had long contended with a stubborn world, and thrown down many a blessing upon them ; and, when all his other gifts could not prevail, he at last made a gift of himself, to testify his affection, and engage theirs. The account which we have of our Saviour’s life in the Gospel, all along presents us with the story of his love ; all the pains that he took, and the troubles that he endured, were the wonderful effects, and uncontrollable evidences of it. But O that last, that dismal scene ! Is it possible to remember it, and question

* Ὡς δ’ οὐκ ἔτ’ εἶχ’ οἴστους,
 ἠσχαλλεν, εἰθ’ ἑαυτὸν
 ἀφῆκεν εἰς βελεμνον,
 μέσος δὲ καρδίας μου
 ἔδυε, καὶ μ’ ἔλυσε.

Anacreon. Ode xiv. — Ed.

his kindness, or deny him ours? Here, here it is, my dear friend, that we should fix our most serious and solemn thoughts: “that Christ may dwell in our hearts by faith; that we, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints, what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height: and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that we may be filled with all the fulness of God.”*

We ought, also, frequently to reflect on those particular tokens of favour and love, which God has bestowed on ourselves; how long he has borne with our follies and sins, and waited to be gracious unto us; wrestling, as it were, with the stubbornness of our hearts, and essaying every method to reclaim us. We should keep a register in our minds, of all the eminent blessings and deliverances which we have experienced; some of which have been so conveyed, that we might clearly perceive them not to be the mere issues of chance, but gracious effects of the divine favour, and signal returns of our prayers. Nor ought we to embitter the thoughts of these things, with any harsh or unworthy suspicion, as if they were designed on purpose to enhance our guilt, and heighten our eternal damnation. No, no, my friend, God is love, and he hath no pleasure in the ruin of his creatures: if they abuse his goodness, and turn his grace into wantonness, and hereby plunge themselves into the

* Eph. iii. 17. 19.

greater depths of guilt and misery, this is the effect of their obstinate wickedness, and not the design of those benefits which he bestows.

If these considerations had once begotten in our hearts a real love and affection towards Almighty God, that would easily lead us unto the other branches of religion, and therefore I shall need to say the less of them.

TO BEGET CHARITY, WE MUST REMEMBER THAT ALL
MEN ARE NEARLY RELATED UNTO GOD.

We shall find our hearts enlarged in charity towards men, by considering the relation which they bear to God, and the impresses of his image, which are stamped upon them. They are not only his creatures, the workmanship of his hands, but his resemblances, of whom he takes special care, and for whom he has a very dear and tender regard; having laid the design of their happiness, before the foundations of the world, and being willing to live and converse with them, to all the ages of eternity. The meanest and most contemptible person whom we behold, is the offspring of heaven, one of the children of the most High; and, however unworthily of that relation he may behave himself, so long as God hath not disowned him by a final sentence, he will have us to acknowledge him as one of His, and, as such, to embrace him with a sincere and cordial affection. You know what a great interest we are wont to have, for those who, in any way, belong to the per-

son whom we love; how gladly we lay hold on every opportunity to gratify the child or servant of a friend: and surely our love towards God would as naturally spring forth, in charity towards men, were we mindful of the interest that he is pleased to take in them; and did we consider, that every soul is dearer unto him, than all the material world; and that he did not account the blood of his Son, too great a price for their redemption.

THAT THEY CARRY GOD'S IMAGE UPON THEM.

Again; as all men stand in a near relation to God, so they have still so much of his image stamped upon them, as may oblige and excite us to love them; in some, this image is more eminent and conspicuous, and we can discern the lovely traces of wisdom and goodness; and though, in others, it is miserably sullied and defaced, yet it is not altogether erased; some lineaments, at least, still remain.* All men are endued with rational and immortal souls, with understandings and wills capable of the highest and most excellent things; and if they be, at present, disordered and put out of

* 'Yet the human mind, however stunned and weakened by its dreadful fall, still retains some faint idea, some confused and obscure notions, of the good it has lost, and some remaining seeds of its heavenly original, — *cognati semina cœli*.'

Abp. Leighton, Prelect. ii.

'The image of God in the soul of man, is not so thoroughly defaced by the stain of earthly affections, that some extreme lineaments, as it were, do not remain upon it.'

S. August. tom. x. p. 3. — Ed.

tune, by wickedness and folly, this may, indeed, move our compassion, but ought not, in reason, to extinguish our love. When we see a person in a rugged humour, and perverse disposition; full of malice and dissimulation; very foolish and very proud, — it is hard to fall in love with an object, that presents itself unto us under an idea so little grateful and lovely. But, when we shall consider these evil qualities as the diseases and distempers of a soul, which, in itself, is capable of all that wisdom and goodness, with which the best of saints have ever been adorned; and which may, one day, be raised unto such heights of perfection, as shall render it a fit companion for the holy angels, — this will turn our aversion into pity, and make us behold him, with such feelings, as we should have, when we look upon a beautiful body, that was mangled with wounds, or disfigured by some loathsome disease; and, however we hate the vices, we shall not cease to love the man.

TO BEGET PURITY, WE SHOULD CONSIDER THE
DIGNITY OF OUR NATURE.

In the next place, for purifying our souls, and disentangling our affections from the pleasures and enjoyments of this lower life, let us frequently ponder the excellency and dignity of our nature; and think, what a shameful and unworthy thing it is, for so noble and divine a creature as the soul of man, to be sunk and immersed in brutish and sensual desires, or amused with airy and fantastical

delights, and so to lose the relish of solid and spiritual pleasures; that the beast should be fed and pampered in us, and the man and the Christian be starved. Did we but consider who we are, and for what we were made, this would teach us, in a right sense, to reverence and stand in awe of ourselves*; it would beget a modesty and shamefacedness, and make us very shy and reserved, in the use of the most innocent and allowable pleasures.

WE SHOULD MEDITATE OFTEN ON THE JOYS OF
HEAVEN.

It will be very effectual to the same purpose, that we frequently raise our minds towards heaven, and represent to our thoughts, the joys that are at God's right hand, "those pleasures that endure for evermore;—for every man that hath this hope in him, purifieth himself, even as he is pure."† If our heavenly country be much in our thoughts, it will make us, "as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul, and keep ourselves unspotted from this world," that we may be fit for the enjoyments and felicities of the other. But then, we must see to it, that our notions of heaven be not gross and carnal, that we dream not of a Mahometan Paradise, nor rest on those meta-

* Μαλιστα δ' αισχυνοσ σαυτον.

Especially reverence thyself.

Pythag. — Ed.

† 1 John, iii. 3.

phors and similitudes, by which these joys are sometimes represented, for this might, perhaps, have quite a contrary effect: it might entangle us farther in carnal affections, and we should be ready to indulge ourselves in a very liberal foretaste of those pleasures, wherein we had placed our everlasting felicity. But, when we come once to conceive aright of those pure and spiritual pleasures; when the happiness we propose to ourselves, is from the sight, and love, and enjoyment of God; and when our minds are filled with the hopes and forethoughts of that blessed estate, — O how mean and contemptible, will all things here below appear in our eyes! With what disdain shall we reject the gross and muddy pleasures, that would deprive us of those celestial enjoyments, or, in any way, unfit and indispose us for them!

HUMILITY ARISES FROM THE CONSIDERATION OF OUR FAILINGS.

The last branch of religion is humility, and surely we can never want matter of consideration for begetting it. All our wickednesses and imperfections, all our follies and our sins, may help to pull down that fond and overweening conceit, which we are apt to entertain of ourselves. That which makes any body esteem us, is their knowledge or apprehension of some little good, and their ignorance of a great deal of evil, that may be in our character; were they thoroughly acquainted with us, they would quickly change their opinion. The

thoughts which, in the best and most serious day of our life, pass in our heart, if exposed to public view, would render us either hateful or ridiculous : and now, however we conceal our failings from one another, yet surely we are conscious of them ourselves ; and some serious reflections upon them, would much qualify and allay the vanity of our spirits. Thus holy men have come really to think worse of themselves, than of any other person in the world : not but that they knew, that gross and scandalous vices, are, in their nature, more heinous than the surprisals of temptations and infirmity ; but, because they were much more intent on their own miscarriages, than on those of their neighbours, and considered all the aggravations of the one, and every thing that might be supposed to diminish and alleviate the other.

THOUGHTS OF GOD GIVE US THE LOWEST THOUGHTS
OF OURSELVES.

But it is well observed by a pious writer, that the deepest and most pure humility does not so much arise from the consideration of our own faults and defects, as from a calm and quiet contemplation of the divine purity and goodness. Our spots never appear so clearly, as when we place them before this infinite light ; and we never seem less in our own eyes, than when we look down upon ourselves from on high. O how little, how nothing, do all those shadows of perfection then appear, for which we are wont to value ourselves. That

humility which comes from a view of our own sinfulness and misery, is more turbulent and boisterous; but the other lays us full as low; and wants nothing, but that anguish and vexation wherewith our souls are apt to boil, when they are the nearest objects of our thoughts.

**PRAYER, ANOTHER INSTRUMENT OF RELIGION; AND
THE ADVANTAGES OF MENTAL PRAYER.**

There remains yet another means for begetting a holy and religious disposition in the soul; and that is fervent and hearty prayer. Holiness is the gift of God; indeed the greatest gift he can bestow, or we are capable to receive; and he has promised his holy Spirit to those that ask it of him. In prayer, we make the nearest approaches to God, and lie open to the influences of heaven: then it is, that the sun of righteousness visits us with his directest rays, and dissipates our darkness, and imprints his image on our souls. I cannot now insist, on the advantage of this exercise, or the dispositions wherewith it ought to be performed; and there is no need that I should, there being so many books which treat on this subject. I shall only tell you, that there is one sort of prayer, wherein we make use of the voice, which is necessary in public, and may sometimes have its own advantage in private; and another, wherein, though we utter no sound, yet we conceive the expressions, and form the words, as it were, in our minds: but there is a third and more sublime kind of prayer, wherein

the soul takes a higher flight; and, having collected all its forces by long and serious meditation, darts itself, if I may so speak, towards God, in sighs and groans, and thoughts too big for expression. As when, after a deep contemplation of the divine perfections, appearing in all his works of wonder, it addresses itself to Him, in the profoundest adoration of his majesty and glory: or when, after sad reflections on its vileness and miscarriages, it prostrates itself before him, with the greatest confusion and sorrow, not daring to lift up its eyes, or utter one word in his presence: or when, having well considered the beauty of holiness, and the unspeakable felicity of those that are truly good, it pants after God, and sends up such vigorous and ardent desires, as no words can sufficiently express; continuing and repeating each of these acts, as long as it finds itself upheld by the force and impulse of the previous meditation.

This mental prayer, is, of all other, the most effectual to purify the soul, and dispose it unto a holy and religious temper; it may be termed the great secret of devotion, and one of the most powerful instruments of the divine life: and it may be, the apostle hath a peculiar respect unto it, when he says, that “the Spirit helpeth our infirmities, making intercession for us with groanings that cannot be uttered;” or, as the original may bear, that *cannot be worded*. Yet I do not so recommend this sort of prayer, as to supersede the

use of the other ; for we have so many several things to pray for, and every petition of this nature requires so much time, and so great an intention of spirit, that it were not easy therein to overtake them all. To say nothing of the fact, that the deep sighs and heavings of the heart, which are wont to accompany it, are something oppressive to nature, and make it hard to continue long in them. But, certainly, a few of these inward aspirations will do more, than a great many fluent and melting expressions.

RELIGION IS TO BE ADVANCED BY THE SAME MEANS,
BY WHICH IT IS BEGUN ; AND THE USE OF THE
HOLY SACRAMENT TOWARDS IT.

Thus, my dear friend, I have briefly proposed the method, which I judge proper for moulding the soul into a holy frame. And the same means which serve to get this divine temper, must still be practised for strengthening and advancing it. Therefore I shall recommend but one more, for that purpose ; and that is the frequent and conscientious use of that holy Sacrament, which is peculiarly appointed to nourish and increase the spiritual life, when once it is begotten in the soul. All the instruments of religion meet together in this ordinance ; and while we address ourselves to it, we are induced to practise all the rules which have been mentioned before. Then it is, that we make the severest survey of our actions, and lay the

strictest obligations on ourselves: then are our minds raised to the highest contempt of the world, and every grace exercises itself with the greatest advantage: and then, if ever, the soul makes its most powerful sallies towards heaven, and assaults it with a holy and acceptable force. And, certainly, the neglect or careless performance of this duty, is one of the chief causes that bedwarfs our religion, and makes us continue of so low a size.

But it is time I should put a close to this letter, which is grown to a far greater bulk than at first I intended. If these poor papers can do you the smallest service, I should think myself very happy in this undertaking; at least, I am hopeful you will kindly accept the sincere endeavours, of a person who would fain acquit himself, of some part of that which he owes you.

A PRAYER.

‘ And now, O most gracious God, father and fountain of mercy and goodness, who hast blessed us with the knowledge of our happiness, and the way that leads to it, excite in our souls such ardent desires after the one, as may put us forth to the diligent prosecution of the other. Let us neither presume on our own strength, nor distrust thy divine assistance; but, while we are doing our utmost endeavours, teach us still to depend on thee for success. Open our eyes, O God, and

teach us out of thy law. Bless us with an exact and tender sense of our duty, and a knowledge to discern perverse things. O that our ways were directed to keep thy statutes ; then shall we not be ashamed, when we have respect unto all thy commandments. Possess our hearts with a generous and holy disdain of all those poor enjoyments, which this world holds out to allure us, that they may never be able to inveigle our affections, or betray us to any sin. Turn away our eyes from beholding vanity, and quicken thou us in thy law. Fill our souls with such a deep sense, and full persuasion, of those great truths which thou hast revealed in the Gospel, as may influence and regulate our whole conversation ; and that the life which we henceforth live in the flesh, we may live, through faith in the Son of God. O that the infinite perfections of thy blessed nature, and the astonishing expressions of thy goodness and love, may conquer and overpower our hearts ; that they may be constantly rising towards thee, in flames of the devoutest affection, and, for thy sake, enlarging themselves in sincere and cordial love towards all the world ; and that we may cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in thy fear, without which, we can never hope to behold and enjoy thee. Finally, O God, grant that the consideration of what thou art, and what we ourselves are, may both humble, and lay us low before thee, and also stir up in us the

strongest, and most ardent aspirations towards thee. We desire to resign, and give ourselves up. to the conduct of thy holy Spirit; lead us in thy truth and teach us, for thou art the God of our salvation: guide us with thy counsel, and afterwards receive us into glory, for the merits and intercession of thy blessed Son our Saviour.' *Amen.*

DISCOURSES

ON IMPORTANT SUBJECTS.

BY THE REV. H. SCOUGAL.

SERMON I.

THE SUPERIOR EXCELLENCY OF THE RELIGIOUS.

PROV. XII. 26.

The Righteous is more excellent than his Neighbour.

HE who considers the excellency and advantage of piety and religion, how conformable it is to the best principle of our nature, and how profitable to our interests, may justly be surprised, at the bad entertainment it receives in the world; and will easily conclude, that this must needs flow from some gross mistakes about it, and prejudices against it; since, when things are not misrepresented, it is so natural to us, to love that which is good, and delight in that which is amiable.

Certainly, all who are enemies to holiness, have taken up false measures, and disadvantageous notions of it. The sensual person hates it, as harsh and unpleasant, doing violence to his carnal appetites; and looks on religion, as a contrivance to deprive and rob him of the pleasures of this world,

by proposing those of another. The politic wit slights it as foolish and imprudent; and, though he acknowledges it, as a necessary instrument of government, as a good device to overawe a multitude, yet he counts it a great weakness, to be further concerned in it, than may be consistent with, and subservient to, secular designs. Again, the gallants of our age, despise it as a base ignoble temper, unworthy of a high birth and genteel education; incident to meaner souls, proceeding from cowardly and superstitious fear, depressing the mind, and rendering it incapable of high and aspiring thoughts. Hence they made it their business, to pour contempt upon piety, and to advance the reputation of those vicious courses which themselves have embraced. And because there are yet some left, who, by practising and recommending virtue, oppose and condemn their lewd practices, they study to avenge themselves on them, by the persecution of their tongues, and by all the scoffs and reproaches they can invent and utter. A means, which has proved most unhappily successful, in deterring many weak minds from goodness; making them chuse to be wicked, that they may not be laughed at.

It is to discover the grossness of this mistake, and to expose the absurdities and unreasonableness of these principles and practices; — to vindicate the excellency of piety, and to recommend it to all truly generous souls, — that we have made choice of this text; which tells us, in short and

plain terms, that “the righteous is more excellent than his neighbour.”

None can be so little acquainted with the scripture dialect, as not to know, that, though righteousness, in its truest acceptation, imports only the observation of those duties which we owe our neighbour, yet it is usually taken, more largely, for piety and virtue in general. And good reason too; since there is no part of our duty, which we do not owe as a debt unto God; no exercise of religion, which is not an act of justice: whence the clear import of the text is, that, whatever excellency other persons may pretend to, pious and religious men alone, are the truly noble and generous persons in the world; as the Psalmist expresses it, “The saints are excellent ones in the earth.”

Now, we shall not trouble you, with any further explication of the words, which are so clear, or with any division of a proposition so simple. But shall rather illustrate and confirm the assertion, by producing such undoubted evidences of nobleness and excellency, as are proper to godliness, and to those who practise it. Where we may have occasion to hint at such characters of a pious man, as, besides the general design, may, perhaps, serve to put us in mind of some parts of our duty, which we are not so careful to observe; and which, therefore, may be useful, even to those who have already embraced the practice of religion.

Being to speak of the nobleness and excellency of religion, it may be expected, that we should say

something of its origin and extract; the whole of nobility, which some understand, and others pretend to. We might take occasion to discover the folly, of glorying in the antiquity of an illustrious house, or the famed virtue of worthy ancestors, who, perhaps, were they alive, would disown their degenerate progeny. But I shall not insist upon this; it is a vanity which has been chastised sufficiently even by heathen pens.* Nay, we shall so far comply with the common sentiments of the world, as to acknowledge, that high birth and liberal education may contribute much, to elevate the minds of men, and accustom them to great thoughts. But surely, whatever advantages any may pretend to by their birth, there are none to be preferred to the children of God, the blood-royal of heaven, the brethren of Christ; of whom we may say, that “as he is, so are they; each one resembling the son of a king.”

If we trace the lines of earthly extraction, we shall find them all meet in one point; all terminate in dust and earth. But in the heraldry of heaven, we shall find a twofold pedigree. Sin is the offspring of hell; and “wicked men are of their father the devil,” whose work they perform. On the other hand, holiness is the seed of God; and the saints have obtained to be called “the Sons of the Most High.” And think not, that these are empty titles, and big words, to amuse the world; no, they

* See particularly Juvenal, *Sat.* viii. — ED.

are equally just and important. Pious men are really “partakers of the divine nature,” and shall obtain an interest in the inheritance which is entailed on that relation. Never were the qualities of a parent more really derived unto their children, than the image and similitude of the divine excellencies are stamped upon these heaven-born souls. Some beams of that eternal light are darted in upon them, and make them shine with an eminent splendour: and they are always aspiring to a nearer conformity with him, still breathing after a further communication of his Holy Spirit, and daily finding the power of that spirit correcting the ruder deformities of their natures, and superinducing the beautiful delineations of God’s image upon them: so that, any who observe them, may perceive their relation to God, by the excellency of their deportment in the world.

Having spoken of the righteous or godly man’s excellency, in respect of his birth and extraction, we proceed to consider his qualities and endowments; and shall begin with those of his understanding, his knowledge, and wisdom. The wise man tells us, that “a man of understanding is of an excellent spirit.” And surely, if any man in the world is to be esteemed for knowledge, it is the pious man. His knowledge is conversant about the noblest objects; he contemplates that infinite being, whose perfections can never enough be admired, but still afford new matter to astonish and delight him; to ravish his affections; to raise

his wonder. He studies the law of God, “which maketh him wiser than all his teachers.” As Dr. Tillotson has it, ‘It is deservedly accounted an excellent piece of knowledge, to understand the laws of the land, the customs of the country we live in; how much more to know the statutes of heaven, the eternal laws of righteousness, the will of the universal monarch, and the customs of that country where we hope to live for ever?’ And, if we have a mind to the studies of nature and human science, he is best disposed for it, having his faculties cleared, and his understanding heightened, by divine contemplations.

But his knowledge does not rest in speculation; it directs his practice, and determines his choice. And he is the most prudent, as well as the most knowing person. He knows how to secure his greatest interest; to provide for the longest life; to prefer solid pleasures to gilded trifles; the soul to the body; eternity to a moment. He knows the temper of his own spirit; he can moderate his passions, and over-rule his carnal appetites: which, certainly, is a far more important piece of wisdom, than to understand the intrigues of a state, to fathom the councils of princes, to know the pulse of a people, or to balance the interests of kingdoms. Yea, piety heightens and advances even moral prudence itself: for while both direct and oblige a man to “order his affairs with discretion,” piety “maketh the simple wise.” And what was said by holy David, and twice repeated by his wise son,

will hold good in every man's experience, that "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." And thus much of the knowledge and wisdom, in which the righteous man excelleth his neighbour.

We proceed to another of his endowments; the greatness of his mind, and his contempt of the world. We can never take better measures of a man's spirit, than from the things in which he delights, and on which he sets his heart.* To be taken up with trifles, and concerned in little things, is an evidence of a weak and naughty mind. And such are all wicked and irreligious persons: their thoughts are confined to low and mean things; to designs of scraping together money, or spending it in luxury; of satisfying an appetite, or pleasing a passion; of obtaining the favour of great ones, or the applause of the vulgar. The greatest happiness at which they aim, is to be masters of the country where they live; to dwell in stately houses, and to be backed with a train of attendants; to lie softly, and fare deliciously, and such miserable attainments; which a wise man would think himself unhappy, if he could not despise.

But the pious person has his thoughts far above these painted vanities. His felicity is not patched up of so mean shreds; it is simple and comprized in one chief good: his soul advances itself, by rational movements, towards the Author of its being, the fountain of goodness and pleasure; "I

* 'Qualis amor, talis animus.'

have none in heaven, but Thee ; and there is none upon earth, whom I desire beside Thee."

The knowledge of nature has been reputed a good means to enlarge the soul, and to breed in it a contempt of earthly enjoyments. He that has accustomed himself to consider the vastness of the universe, and the small proportion which the point we live, in bears to the rest of the world, may, perhaps, come to think less, of the possession of some acres, or of that fame, which can, at most, spread itself through a small corner of this earth. Whatever be in this, sure I am, that the knowledge of God, and the frequent thoughts of heaven, must needs prove far more effectual, to elevate and aggrandize the mind. When once the soul, by contemplation, is raised to any right apprehension of the divine perfections, and to foretastes of celestial bliss, how will this world, and all that is in it, vanish and disappear before his eyes? With what holy disdain, will he look down upon things, which are the highest objects of other men's ambitious desires? All the splendour of courts, all the pageantry of greatness, will no more dazzle his eyes, than the faint lustre of a glow-worm will trouble the eagle, after it has been beholding the sun. He is little concerned, who obtained this dignity, or that fortune ; who sits highest at table, or goes first out of the door. His thoughts are taken up with greater matters ; how he shall please his Maker, and obtain an interest in that land of promise, some of whose fruits he has already

tasted. And from hence arises that constant and equal frame of spirit, which the pious man's mind maintains, in all the changes and vicissitudes of things. While he who has not his spirit balanced by religious principles, is lifted up, and cast down, like a ship on the sea, with every variation of fortune; and partakes, perhaps, of all the motions of this inferior world, to which his heart and affections are riveted. And, certainly, he must be far more happy and generous too, who sits loose to the world, and who can, with the greatest calmness and tranquillity, possess his own soul, while all things without are hurry and confusion. Private disasters cannot discompose, nor public calamities reach him; he looks upon the troubles and combustions of the world, as men do on the ruin and desolation of cities in which themselves have little interest; with no other concernment, than that of pity, to see men trouble themselves and others, to so little purpose. If the world should shake, and the foundations of the earth be removed*, yet would he rest secure, in a full acquiescence to the will of God, and a confident dependence on his providence: "He shall not be afraid of any evil tidings: his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord."

And this, by the affinity, will lead us to another endowment, in which the excellency of the righteous man appears; that heroic magnanimity

* "Si fractus illabatur orbis, &c."

and courage, with which he is inspired ; which makes him confidently achieve the most difficult actions, and resolutely undergo the hardest sufferings, that he is called to. For this, see the epistle to the Hebrews : “ Through faith some have subdued kingdoms ;” this was their active courage. “ Others again were tortured, &c. ;” this was their passive courage, which, in Christians, is most eminent and useful. True valour more appears, by suffering than by doing ; and, doubtless, this is the harder trial of the two. Were it not for suffering hardships, the greatest coward in the world, would be man enough for the highest enterprises. It is not so much the difficulty of great actions, as the danger that attends them, which makes men fear to undertake them : so that, to suffer cheerfully, must be the greatest proof of courage. And surely, we may appeal to the world, to produce such eminent instances of fortitude and resolution, as Christian martyrs have shown, under those torments which cannot be mentioned without horror. How often has their constancy amazed their bloody persecutors, and outwearied the cruelties of their tormentors ! Nor was this patience per-force : they might have saved themselves that trouble, by throwing a little incense into the fire, or speaking a few blasphemous words ; but well had they learned “ not to fear those who can kill the body, &c.” Nor were they borne out by an obstinate humour, and perverse stoical wilfulness : they were neither stupid and

insensible, nor proud and self-conceited; their sufferings were undertaken with calmness, and sustained with moderation.

Let Heathen Rome boast of a Regulus, a Decius, or some two or three more, stimulated by a desire of glory, and perhaps animated by some secret hopes of future reward, who have devoted their life to the service of their country. But what is this, to an infinite number, not only of men, but even of women and children, who have died for the profession of their faith; neither seeking, nor expecting, any praise from men? And tell me, who among the heathen, willingly endured the loss of reputation? Nay, that was their idol, and they could not part with it. And, certainly, it is great meanness of spirit, to be overawed with fear of disgrace, and to depend upon the thoughts of the people. True courage equally fortifies the mind against all those evils, and will make a man hazard his honour, as well as other things, when occasion calls for it.

Now, if the celebrated actions of the Heathen come short of true courage, what shall we say of the furious boldness of the Hectors of our age, who pretend to prowess and gallantry, by far less reasonable methods? When, blinded with passion, and animated with wine, they are ready enough, on half a quarrel, to hazard their own, and their neighbour's life, and soul too, in a duel! Yea, they will not scruple to brave heaven itself, and to provoke the Almighty, by their horrid oaths and blasphemies.

One would think, that these must needs be the hardiest and most valiant people in the world; if they are not afraid of the Almighty, surely nothing else should fright them. And yet, you shall find these very persons, when cast on a bed by sickness, or brought to the scaffold by justice, betraying a miserable faintness and pusillanimity. They are forced now to think on the terrors of death, and the more terrible consequences of it; and their counterfeit courage, destitute of those props which formerly sustained it, now discovers its weakness. Nor is it any wonder: for what should make a man willingly leave this world, unless he expected a more happy condition in another? Certainly, nothing can fortify the soul with a true and manly courage, but a confidence in God, and the hope of future blessedness. “The wicked flee when no man pursueth; but the righteous is bold as a lion;” and, from that, he is justly accounted “more excellent than his neighbour.”

From courage and magnanimity, we pass to that, which is its genuine issue, and ordinary consequence, the liberty and freedom of the righteous person. Liberty is a privilege so highly rated by all men, that many run the greatest hazards for its very name: but there are few who enjoy it in reality. I shall not speak of those fetters of ceremony, and chains of state, wherewith great men are tied; which make their actions constrained, and their converse uneasy: this is more to be pitied than blamed. But wicked and irreligious persons are under a far more shame-

ful bondage: they are slaves to their own passions, and suffer the violence and tyranny of their irregular appetites. This is frequently talked of, but seldom considered or believed; and therefore it will not be amiss to bring an instance or two, for the illustration of it. Observe a passionate man, and you shall find him frequently transported and overpowered by his anger, and carried to those extremities, of which a little time makes him ashamed; and he becomes as much displeased with himself, as formerly he was with his adversary: and yet, on the next occasion, he will obey that same passion which he has condemned. What a drudge is a covetous man to his riches; which take up his thoughts all the day long, and break his sleep in the night? How must the ambitious man fawn and flatter, and cross his very humour, with hopes to satisfy it; stoop to the ground, that he may aspire; courting and caressing those whom he hates: which, doubtless, is done with a great violence and constraint. The drunkard, when he awakes, and has slept out his cups and his frolic humour, and finds his head aching, his stomach qualmish, perhaps his purse empty, and reflects on the folly, and, unhandsome expressions or actions, into which he may have fallen, in his drink, how will he condemn himself for that excess? What harangues shall we have from him, in the praise of temperance! What promises and resolutions of future sobriety! And yet, on the next occasion, the poor slave shall be dragged away to the tavern, by those whom he must call his friends; and must thank them, who put

upon him that abuse, which a wise and sober person would rather die than suffer. Further, the luxurious would fain preserve, or recover, his health ; and, to this end, he finds it requisite to keep a temperate and sober diet. No ; but he must not. He is present at a feast, and his superior appetite calls for a large measure of delicious fare ; and his palate must be pleased, though the whole body should suffer for it : or he has met with a profligate woman ; and though his whole bones should rot, “ and a dart strike through his liver,” yet must he obey the command of his passions : “ He goeth after her straightway, as the ox goeth to the slaughter, or as a fool to the correction of the stocks.” Now, there can be no greater evidence of slavery and bondage, than thus to do, what themselves know to be prejudicial. It were easy to illustrate this bondage and thralldom of the soul, in all the other instances of vice and impiety. And certainly, what Saint Peter says of some false teachers, may be well applied to all wicked persons : “ While they promise freedom, they themselves are the servants of corruption : for, of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage.”

But the holy and religious person has broken these fetters : has cast off the yoke of sin, and become the freeman of the Lord. It is religion, that restores freedom to the soul, which philosophy did but pretend to : it is that, which sways and moderates all those blind passions and impetuous affections, which else would hinder a man from the

possession and enjoyment of himself; and which makes him master of his own thoughts, motions, and desires; that he may do with freedom, what he judges most honest and convenient. And thus “the righteous man excelleth his neighbour,” as much as a freeman excels the basest slave.

Another particular, wherein the nobleness and excellency of religion appears, is in a charitable and benign temper. There is no greater evidence of a base and narrow soul, than for a man to have all his thoughts taken up with private and selfish interests; and if those interests be prosperous, not to care what becomes of the rest of the world. On the other hand, an extensive charity and kindness, as it is the one half of our religion, so it is an eminent point of generosity. “The righteous is gracious, and full of compassion; he sheweth favour and lendeth:” and makes it his work, to serve mankind as much as he is able. His bounty is not confined to his kindred and relations, to those of his own party and mode of religion: this were but a disguised kind of self-love. It is enough to him, that they are Christians; or, if they were not, yet are they men; and therefore deserve our pity, not our hatred or neglect, because of their errors. It is true, he has a special kindness for those, in whom he discovers a principle of goodness and virtue: in those excellent ones, is all his delight. But then, he takes his measure, not so much from their judgment and opinions, as from the integrity of their life, and the exactness of their practices.

His charity does not express itself in one particular instance, for example, that of giving alms; but is vented in as many ways, as the variety of occasions require, and his power can attain. He assists the poor, with his money; the ignorant, with his counsel; the afflicted, with his comfort; the sick, with the best of his skill; all, with his blessings and prayers. If he cannot build hospitals, yet he will study to persuade those who can. If he has no money to redeem captives, yet will he employ his interest in the court of heaven for their deliverance. Though he cannot recover a dying child to the afflicted parents, yet will he endeavour to persuade them to submission and resignation, which will render them more happy. And thus, in every emergency, it will go hard with him, if he does not find some way, either to benefit, or oblige, every man with whom he converses. Nor, let any man upbraid us, with the contrary practices of many high pretenders to religion, who are notedly selfish and churlish persons. We are not to defend the actions of all who would be thought godly; nor must you take your measures of piety, from what you observe in them. But look through the Gospel, and you shall find charity and bounty so passionately recommended, so frequently inculcated, and so indispensably required, that you may easily conclude there are no Christians in earnest, but those who practise it. Yea, so peculiar is this liberal and benign temper to holy and religious persons, that nothing but a faint resemblance, and false imi-

tation, is to be found elsewhere in the world. Other men's seeming bounty is always marred, by the base principle from which it proceeds, and the selfish purpose to which it tends. The Apostle has told us, that "a man may give all his goods to feed the poor, and yet want charity;" and all these expenses shall profit him nothing. Importunity, or a willingness to be delivered from the trouble of a miserable spectacle, may, perhaps, wring something out of his pocket; but vanity and a desire of applause, have, usually, the greatest interest in his distributions. This made the hypocrites of old, proclaim their alms with trumpets; and this makes their successors in our times, delight to have their good works of this kind, recorded to the greatest advantage, that posterity may read them on walls, and in public registers.

To the same principle, must we refer, what, in the world, passes for a very considerable instance of generosity; the keeping of a great house, and well-furnished table: which, nevertheless, is more ordinarily the effect of pride and vain-glory, than of humility or hospitality. It is a part of men's splendour and state; and they deck their tables, for the same end that they put on fine clothes, to be talked of and admired in the world. You may guess it, by the persons whom they entertain; who are usually such as need least of their charity, and for whom they have, very often, as little kindness or concernment, as an innkeeper for his guests; nor are they less mercenary than he; the one sells his

meat for money, the other for praise. Far more generous is the practice of the pious man; who, as he chuses most to benefit those who can make him no recompence, so he does not trouble the world with the noise of his charity: yea, “his left hand knoweth not, what his right hand bestoweth:” and that which most endears his bounty, is the love and affection whence it proceeds.

We shall name but one instance more, in which the righteous man excels his neighbour; and that is, his venerable temperance and purity. He has risen above the vaporous sphere of sensual pleasure, which darkens and debases the mind; which sullies its lustre, and abates its native vigour: while profane persons, wallowing in impure desires, sink themselves below the condition of men. Can there be any spark of generosity, any degree of excellency, in him, who makes his belly his god, or who places his felicity in the madness of sensual enjoyment? We spoke before of the slavery, we speak now of the deformity, of these sins: and shall add, that one of the most shameful and miserable spectacles in the world, is, to see a man born to the use of reason, and perhaps to an eminent fortune, drink away his religion, his reason, his sense; and so expose himself to the pity of wise men; the contempt of his own servants; the derision of his children, and fools; to every danger, and to every snare; and that this must pass, in the eyes of many, for a piece of gallantry, the necessary accomplishment of a gentleman. How are the minds of men

poisoned with perverse notions? What unreasonable measures do they take of things? We may expect next, that they shall commend theft, and make harangues in praise of parricide; for they are daily advancing the boldness of their impieties, and with confidence avowing them. Other ages have practised wickedness; but to ours, is reserved the impudence to glory in it. But, would men but open their eyes, and give way to the sentiments of their own minds, they would soon alter their maxims, and discover the miserable deformity of vice, and the beauty and majesty of religion; that it at once adorns and advances human nature; and has in it every thing generous and noble, cheerful and spiritual, free and ingenuous; in a word, that the righteous is more excellent than his neighbour.

Before we proceed further, it will be necessary to remove some prejudices and objections, which arise against the nobleness and excellency of religion. And the first is, that it enjoins lowliness and humility; which men ordinarily look upon as an abject and base disposition. What, will they say, can that man ever aspire to any thing excellent, whose principles oblige him to lie low and grovel on the ground; who thinks nothing of himself, and is content that all the world think nothing of him? Is this a disposition fit for any, but those whose cross fortune obliges them to suffer miseries and affronts? Such are men's thoughts of humility; which God loves so much, that, we may

say, he sent his own Son from heaven, to teach and recommend it. But, if we ponder the matter, we shall find, that arrogance and pride are the issues of base and silly minds, a giddiness incident to those who are raised suddenly to an unaccustomed height. Nor is there any vice, which more palpably defeats its own design; depriving a man of that honour and reputation, which it makes him aim at.

On the other hand, we shall find humility no silly and sneaking quality; but the greatest height and sublimity of the mind, and the only way to true honour: "Before destruction the heart of man is haughty, and before honour is humility." Lowliness is the endowment of high-born and well-educated souls, who are acquainted with the knowledge of excellent things; and, therefore, do not doat upon trifles, or admire little things, merely because they are their own. They have no such high opinion of riches, beauty, strength, or any similar advantages, as to value themselves for them, or to despise those who want them: but they study to surmount themselves, and all the little attainments they have hitherto reached, and are still aspiring to higher and more noble things. And it is worth our notice, that the most deep and pure humility does not so much arise from the consideration of our own faults and defects (though that also may have its proper place), as from a calm contemplation of the divine perfections. By reflecting on ourselves, we may discover something of our own sinfulness and misery; and, consequently, may be filled with a kind

of boisterous and turbulent grief and indignation : but, by fixing our eyes on the infinite greatness and holiness of God, we are most fully convinced of our own meanness. This will sink us to the very bottom of our beings, and make us appear as nothing in our own sight, when beheld from so great a height. And this is, really, the greatest elevation of the soul : and there is nothing in the world so noble and excellent, as the sublimity of humble minds.

Another objection against the excellency of a religious temper, is, that the love of enemies, and the pardon of injuries, which it includes, are utterly inconsistent with the principles of honour. Now, though it be highly unreasonable to examine the laws of our Saviour by such rules as this, yet we shall consider the matter a little. Nor shall we seek to elude or qualify this precept, as some do, by such glosses and evasions, as may suit with their own practices : nay, we shall freely profess, that there is no salvation without the observation of it. A man had even as well abandon Christianity, and renounce his baptism, as obstinately refuse to obey it. But, if we have any value for the judgment of him, who was, at once, both the wisest man, and a great king, he will tell us, that “ it is the honour of man, to cease from strife ; and he that is slow to wrath, is of great understanding.” The meek and lowly person lives above the reach of petty injuries, and blunts the edge of the greatest, by his patience and constancy ; he has compassion towards those

who offend him: being more sorry for the prejudice they do themselves, than for that which they intended him. And, let all the world judge, whether it be more generous to pity and love even those who hate us, and to pardon the greatest offences, than peevishly to quarrel on every petty occasion, and make men fear our passion, hate our humour, and abandon our society? So that, what is here brought as an objection against religion, might, with reason enough, have been brought as an instance of its nobleness.

Having thus illustrated and confirmed what is asserted in the text, that the righteous is more excellent than his neighbour; let us improve it, as a check to that profane and atheistical spirit of drollery and scoffing at religion, which has got abroad in the world. Alas! do men consider what it is, which they make the butt of their scoffs and reproaches? Have they nothing else to exercise their wit, and vent their jests upon, but that which is the most noble and excellent thing in the world? What design can they propose to themselves, by this kind of impiety? Would they have religion banished from the face of the earth, and forced to retire for shame? What a goodly world should we then have of it! What a fine harmony and order of things! Certainly the earth would then become a kind of hell, with tumults and seditions, rapines and murders, secret malice, and open frauds, by every vice, and every calamity. Some little remainders of piety and virtue in the world, alone

keep it in any tolerable condition, or make it possible to be inhabited. And must not those be wretched persons, and woful enemies to mankind, who do what they can, to reduce the world to such a miserable condition? But let them do what they will; they but kick against the pricks. Religion has so much native lustre and beauty, that, notwithstanding all the dirt which they study to cast upon it, all the melancholy and deformed shapes in which they dress it, it will attract the eyes and admiration of all sober and ingenuous persons: and while these men study to make it ridiculous, they shall but make themselves so. And O! that they would consider, how dear they are to pay for those dull and insipid jests, wherewith they persecute religion, and those who practise it, or recommend it! What thoughts they are likely to have of them, when sickness shall arrest, and death threaten them; when the physicians shall have forsaken them, and the poor despised Minister is called in, and they are expecting comfort from him, that they were wont to mock, and perhaps it is little he can afford them: “O that men were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end!”

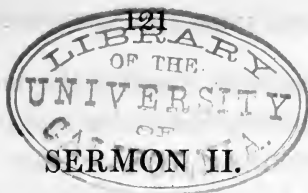
There are others, who have not yet arrived to this height of profaneness, who do not absolutely laugh at all religion; but who vent their malice, at those who are more conscientious and severe than themselves, under presumption that they are hypocrites and dissemblers. But, besides, that in this, they may be guilty of a great deal of uncharitable-

ness, it is to be suspected, that they bear some secret dislike to piety itself; and hate hypocrisy more for its resemblance of that, than for its own viciousness : otherwise, whence comes it, that they do not express the same animosity, against other vices ?

To this, also, we may refer those expressions, which sometimes drop from persons not so utterly debauched, but which yet are blasphemous and profane : ‘ that this man is too holy, and that man too religious ;’ as if it were possible to exceed in these things. What ! can a man approach too near to God ? Can he be too like his Maker ? Is it possible to be over-perfect, or over-happy ? I confess, a man may over-act some parts of religion, and dwell too much on some particular exercises of it, neglecting other as necessary duties. But this is not an excess of piety, it is a defect of discretion. And reason would teach us, rather to pardon men’s infirmities for their pious inclinations, than to blame piety for their infirmities.

Let me, therefore, entreat you all, especially those whose birth and fortunes render them more conspicuous in the world, to countenance holiness, which you see is so excellent ; and to beware, that you do not, by scoffing at the most serious things in the world, contribute to that deluge of wickedness which overflows the earth. And, if I obtain this, I shall make bold to beg one thing more, but it is in your own favours ; that you would also abandon every kind of impiety in your own practice, since, in it, every vile ruffian may vie and contend with

you. In other cases, you forsake modes and customs when they become common. Wickedness is now the most vulgar and ordinary thing in the world. Shift, I beseech you, the fashion, and embrace piety and virtue; in which none but excellent persons shall rival you. Learn to adore your Maker : and think it not beneath you, to stand in awe of Him, who can rend the heavens, and make the foundations of the earth shake ; who needs but withdraw his mercies, to make you miserable ; or his assistance, to reduce you to nothing. Study to ennoble your souls, with solid knowledge and true wisdom ; with an eminent greatness of mind, and contempt of the world ; with a great liberty and freedom of spirit ; an undaunted magnanimity and courage ; an extensive charity and goodness ; a venerable temper and purity ; an amiable meekness and humility. So shall you render yourselves honourable, and more excellent than your neighbours in this world ; and be partakers of immortal honour and glory, in the world to come. *Amen.*



THE INDISPENSABLE DUTY OF LOVING OUR
ENEMIES.

LUKE, VI. 27.

But I say unto you which hear, Love your Enemies.

WHILE we travel through the wilderness of this world, much of the comfort of our pilgrimage depends on the good correspondence, and mutual services and endearments, of our fellow-travellers. Therefore, our blessed Saviour, whose precepts are all intended for our perfection and felicity, fitted to procure to us the good things, both of this world, and of that which is to come, has taken especial care to unite the minds of men, in the strictest bonds of friendship and love. He has been at great pains, by his precepts and by his example, by earnest persuasion and powerful motives, to smooth our rugged humours, to calm our passions, and to free our natures from that roughness and asperity, which hinder us from cementing together. Now, were we to converse with none but such as are Christians in earnest, we should find it no hard matter to live in concord and love; we should meet with no occasion of quarrel and contention; and should only be obliged to love our friends, because all

men would be such. But well did our Saviour know, that his part was to be small in the world; that many would oppose the profession, and many more would neglect the practice, of that religion which he taught; and that his followers, besides common injuries incident to all men, were to meet with much enmity and hatred for their master's sake. And, therefore, that, amidst all these storms, they might maintain that constant serene tranquillity, that sweetness and benignity of spirit, without which they could neither be like him, nor happy in themselves, he was pleased to enjoin such an ardent affection and charity towards all men, as no neglect can cool, no injury can extinguish. To love those who have obliged us, is that which nature might teach, and wicked men practise; to favour those who have never wronged us, is merely an act of common humanity: but our religion requires us to extend our kindness even to those who have injured and abused us, and who continue to do and wish us mischief: and enjoins, that we never shall design any other revenge, against our most bitter and inveterate enemies, than to wish them well, and do them all the good we can, whether they will or not: for unto those that hear him, our Saviour saith, " Love your enemies."

But, alas! how little is this regarded, by the greater part of those, who call themselves Christians. Other precepts are broken and slighted, but this is industriously baffled and discredited. In other cases, we acknowledge our fault, but study to qua-

lify and excuse it, by the frailty of our nature, or violence of a temptation : ‘ we are all sinners ; it is a fault indeed ; but who can help it ? ’ Now, though these excuses are very frivolous, and will be of no force in the great day of account, yet they imply something of modesty and ingenuous acknowledgment ; and men may repent, and forsake what they already condemn. But in the instance of loving enemies, and pardoning offences, many are so bold and impudent, that, instead of obeying, they quarrel with the law, as impossible and unjust ; passing sentence upon that, by which themselves must be judged. ‘ How unreasonable is it, say they, that we should love those that hate us ? What congruity between that act, and those objects ? Can cold snow produce heat, or enmity beget affection ? Must we be insensible of the injuries with which we meet, or reward him that offers them ? Must we dissolve the principles of our nature, and cease to be men, that we may become Christians ? ’ These are either the expressions or thoughts of too many among us. And either Christ must come down in his terms, and remit somewhat of the rigour of his laws, or else, all the promises of the Gospel, all the pleasures of the other world, shall not engage them to his obedience. They will rather chuse to burn in eternal flames of fury and discord, than live at peace with those that have wronged them.

It can, therefore, never be unseasonable to press a duty, so very necessary, yet so much neglected. The text which I have chosen for this purpose, is

very plain and clear : “ Love your enemies.” But, because many strain the precept, to some such sense as may suit with their own practice, we shall first search into its import, and then persuade you to its performance. The full meaning and import of the precept will appear, if we consider, first, Who they are, whom we are commanded to love ; and secondly, Wherein the love which we owe them consists.

The persons whom we are commanded to love, are called our “ enemies.” And lest we should mistake them, they are clearly described in the following words : the fountain of their enmity is within ; they are those “ who hate us ;” who envy our happiness ; who wish our misery ; and who abhor our persons and society. Now, were this fire kept within their breast, it might well scorch themselves, it could not prejudice us : but, “ out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh ;” their malice sharpens their tongues ; they are further described as those that “ curse us ;” they vent their wrath in oaths and imprecations, secret calumnies, and open reproaches. Nor are their hands always bound up ; they “ use us despitefully,” and procure us mischief. Now, if our love must be extended to all these, we shall hardly find any, whom we dare safely exclude. Of our private enemies, there can be no question. But what shall be said, of the enemies of our country ? I see no warrant to exclude them from our charity. We may, indeed, lawfully oppose their violent invasion, and defend our rights with the sword, under

the banner of the public magistrate, to whom such authority is committed : but all this may be done, with as little malice and hatred, as a judge feels, in punishing a malefactor ; the general may be as void of passion, as the lord chief justice ; and the soldier, as the executioner. But charity will oblige a prince, never to have recourse to the sword, till all other remedies fail : to blunt the edge of war, by sparing, as much as may be, the shedding of innocent blood, with all other barbarities that use to accompany it ; and to accept of any reasonable capitulation.

We come next to the enemies of our religion : and, indeed, many are so far from thinking them to be among the number of those whom they are obliged to love, that they look upon it as a part of their duty to hate and malign them. Their zeal is continually venting itself in fierce invectives against Antichrist, and every thing they are pleased to call Antichristian ; and they are ready to apply all the prophecies and imprecations of the Old Testament, in their very prayers, against those that differ from them. And ordinarily, the animosities are greatest, where the differences are least ; and one party of a reformed church shall be more incensed against another, than either against the superstition and tyranny of Rome, or the carnality of the Mahometan faith. Yea, perhaps you may find some who agree in opinion, and only differ in several ways of expressing the same thing, and yet can scarce look on one another without displeasure

and aversion. But, alas! how much do these men disparage that religion, for which they appear so zealous; how much do they mistake the spirit of Christianity! Are the persons whom they hate, greater enemies to religion, than those who persecuted the Apostles and martyrs for professing it? And yet these were the persons, whom our Saviour commanded his disciples to love: and he himself prayed for those that crucified him; and severely checked the disciples, when, by a precedent brought from the Old Testament, they would have called for fire from heaven, on those who would not receive them; telling them, “They knew not what spirit they were of:” that is, they did not consider by what spirit they were prompted to such cruel inclinations; or, as others explain it, they did not yet sufficiently understand the temper and genius of Christianity; which is pure and peaceable; gentle and meek; full of sweetness, and full of love. If men would impartially examine their hatred and animosity against the enemies of their religion, I fear they would find them proceed from a principle, which themselves would not willingly own. Pride and self-conceit will make a man disdain those of a different persuasion; and think it a disparagement to his judgment, that any should differ from it. Mere nature and self-love will make a man hate those, who oppose the interest and advancement of that party which himself has espoused. Hence men are, many times, more displeased at some small mistakes in judgment, than at the greatest immoralities

in practice; yea, perhaps, they will find a secret pleasure, and wicked satisfaction, in hearing or reporting the faults or scandal of their adversaries. Certainly the power of religion rightly prevailing in the soul, would mould us into another temper: it would teach us to love, and pity, and pray for the persons, as well as hate and condemn the errors which they are supposed to espouse: it would make us wish their conversion, rather than their confusion; and be more desirous that God would fit them for another world, than that he would take them out of this. We may, indeed, wish the disappointment of their wicked purposes; for this is charity to them, to keep them from being the unhappy instruments of mischief in the world; but he that can wish plagues and ruin to their persons, and that delights in their sins, or in their misery, has in his temper, more of the devil, than the Christian.

Thus you have seen, who those enemies are, to whom our charity must be extended. It remains to be considered, what is the nature of the love we owe them. I shall not now spend your time in any nice or curious speculations, about the nature of this master-passion. It is the prime affection of the soul, which gives measures, and sets bounds, to all the rest; every man's hatred, grief, and joy, depending upon, and flowing from, his love. I shall now only observe to you, that there is a sensible kind of love, a certain tenderness and melting affection, implanted in us by nature towards our nearest relations, on purpose to engage us to those

peculiar services which we owe them ; and there is an intimacy and delightful union betwixt friends, arising from some especial sympathy of humours, and referring to the maintenance of such correspondencies. These are not always at our command ; nor are we obliged to love either strangers or enemies, at this rate. It is not to be expected, that, at first sight of a person, who hath nothing singularly taking, we should find such a special kindness and tenderness arising for him in our hearts ; much less, can fondness and passionate affection, proceed from the sense of any harm received from him. The command in the text does not amount to this ; though there be a great advantage in a tender and affectionate disposition, both to secure and facilitate our duty. But we are, certainly, obliged to such a sincere and cordial good-will to all men, as will incline us to perform all the good offices in our power, even to those who have offended us. But the nature and measures of this love, will more fully appear, if we consider what it excludes, and what it implies.

First, then, it excludes all harsh thoughts and groundless suspicions. The Apostle tells us, that “ charity thinketh no evil ; that it hopeth all things, believeth all things.” To entertain, with pleasure, every bad report of those who have offended us, and to put the worst construction on their doubtful actions, is both a clear evidence of our hatred, and an unhappy method to continue it. Were the love which we recommend once seated

in the soul, it would soon cast out those restless jealousies, sour suspicions, harsh surmises, and im-bittered thoughts : it would display itself in a more candid and gentle disposition ; in fair glosses, and friendly censures ; in a favourable extenuation of greater faults, and a generous covering of lesser ones. It would make a man interpret all things, in the best manner of which they are capable ; and chuse, rather to be mistaken to his own prejudice, by a too favourable opinion, than to that of his neighbour, by a groundless jealousy. And even in this sense it may be, that “ Charity covereth a multitude of sins.”

Again, the love which we owe to enemies, excludes all causeless and immoderate anger : “ It suffereth long, and is not easily provoked, and endureth all things.” Our Saviour tells us, that “ Whoso is angry with his brother *without* a cause, shall be in danger of the judgment ;” and if his anger *exceed* the cause, he is equally guilty. All anger is not vicious ; we may be angry, and not sin. This passion, as all others implanted in us by God, is innocent, when kept within its due bounds : it has its proper office in the mind, as the spleen in the body ; but its excess and distemper swells into a disease. To make it allowable, it must not exceed the value of the cause, nor the proportion of the circumstances. It must be governed by discretion, and kept within the bounds of reason, that it break not forth into indecent expressions, or violent and blameable actions. And, further, it must not be too permanent and last-

ing : we must not let the sun set upon our anger. Plutarch tells us, that the Pythagoreans were careful to observe the very letter of this precept : for, if anger had boiled up to the height of an injury or reproach, before sunset they would salute each other, and renew their friendship ; they were ashamed, that the same anger which had disturbed the counsels of the day, should also trouble the quiet and repose of the night ; lest, mingling with their rest and dreams, it should become prevalent and habitual in them. And, surely, we owe an infinitely greater deference to the precepts of our blessed Saviour, and his holy apostles, than they did to their master's reasoning and advices. And, though we should not take this precept in its strictest and literal signification, yet this we must know, that the same passion and resentment, which was innocent and rational in its first rise, may become vicious and criminal by its continuance. Anger may kindle in the breast of a wise man, but rests only in the bosom of a fool. And this will lead us to a third thing, which the precept in our text condemns.

The love of enemies here commanded, excludes all rooted malice and rancour, proceeding from the memory and resentment of injuries, after the prejudice sustained by them is over. Certainly, there is nothing more contrary to charity, than a peevish ruminating and poring on the offences we have met with ; and *their* memories are very ill employed, who seldom remember a courtesy, or forget a wrong. It is ordinary for some, who dare

not profess intentions of revenge, to express their resentment in some such threatening as this : ‘ that they will forgive the injury, but never forget it.’ I hope they do not mean, they will pass it by at this time, and revenge it afterward. This would but make the sin the greater, by being more deliberate. Is it, then, that they intend them no harm, but will cease to do them good? This is a lame and imperfect charity ; expressly contradictory to the precept in the text, enjoining us “ to bless them that curse us, to do good to them that hate us, and to pray for them that despitefully use us.” Nor must we expect the blessing of God, if this be all we allow to others ; “ for, with what measure we mete, it shall be measured to us again.” There is but one way, in which we may lawfully remember an injury ; and that is, to be more cautious, in trusting one who has deceived us, or in exposing ourselves to the power of him who has wronged us. In this case, religion allows and directs us, to join the wisdom of the serpent, with the innocency of the dove. But then, I am sure, it is neither necessary nor fit, to threaten those who have wronged us, with our resolution to remember the injury. Without threatening, we may be as cautious as we please. And our threats would infallibly rankle and displease our adversary, which ought to be no part of a Christian’s design. A meek and charitable person will be loth to have his memory infested, and his thoughts soured, with resentment of wrongs ; and, if they occur to his mind, he will make no other use of them, than to

put himself on his guard ; unless, indeed, he thence take occasion to benefit and oblige the person who has offended him, and, as our text expressly directs, to do him good, to bless, and pray for him.

Again, this precept prohibits the taking or procuring any revenge. By revenge, we mean such a simple evil done to our adversary, as brings no real benefit or reputation to ourselves. For, certainly, it is not unlawful, unless some special circumstance makes it so, to seek the reparation of our own right by an authorized judge ; nor yet, to provide for the public security, by the punishment of offenders. This may, many times, be done, without prejudice or hatred, yea, with great kindness and compassion, towards the person of the offender. But, if we have any charity or love to our adversaries, we shall be really afflicted with the evil that befalls them ; and, therefore, will never willingly procure ourselves that trouble, by inflicting it on them. It is evidence of a wicked and malicious humour, to please ourselves in the misery of another ; or to delight in an evil, that brings us no good. Whatever latitude the Jews either had, or pretended to, it is not lawful for us to desire eye for eye, or tooth for tooth ; unless we could say, that our enemy's eye would serve our head, or his hand fit our arm, or his pain allay our torment.

From hence we may judge, what is to be thought of those, who are ready to revenge the smallest injury, even an uncivil expression, with the death of the offender ; unsatisfied, till they have ventured

two lives, and as many souls, in the combat : a thing which should not be named among Christians, but with the same detestation as the vilest actions ; for, with whatever colours of bravery or gallantry it may be painted, it is really nothing else, than a more specious and formal kind of murder. Nor does it differ from the basest assassination, save only in this respect, that, together with the wickedness of attempting another man's life, it joins the rashness and folly of exposing our own.

Lastly, the love which we owe our enemies, excludes all supercilious and scornful contempt and neglect of them ; which I mark the rather, because some think they have sufficiently obeyed the precept, if they overlook an injury, as thinking the injurious person beneath their revenge. Meanwhile, their corrupt nature feels as much pleasure, in the scorn and disdain of their enemies, as it could in the revenge of the injury : their wicked humours are not starved, but only change their diet. Of this nature was the answer of the philosopher, to some who incited and provoked him to revenge : ‘ If an ass kicks me, shall I kick him again ? ’ This is but a lame and mis-shapen charity ; it has more in it of pride than goodness. We should learn of the holy Jesus, who was not only meek, but lowly. We should condemn the injury, and pity the weakness, but we should not disdain or despise the persons of our enemies : “ Charity vaunteth not herself, is not puffed up, doth not behave herself unseemly.”

Having thus discovered those things which are

inconsistent with charity, and excluded by the love of our enemies, it remains, that we show what it imports and requires.

First, then, it imports an inward kindness and affection ; which, if it does not amount to that passionate tenderness which we have for our near relations and intimate friends, implies, at least, a good will towards them, and a friendly concernment in their interest. If we love an enemy, we shall wish his welfare, and rejoice in it, and be unfeignedly sorry for any disaster which befalls him : so far shall we be, from rejoicing in his misfortunes. And, certainly, had we a right sense of things, we should be more troubled, for the harm which our enemy does to his own soul by wronging us, than for any prejudice, which we sustain by him : our compassion towards him, would diminish, if not altogether swallow up, our resentment.

But our kindness and good will towards our enemies, should not rest in empty wishes ; it must express itself in kind words, and friendly actions. When we speak to our enemy, it must be in such smooth, discreet, and obliging terms, as are most likely to mollify and gain him ; that, by soft answers, we may turn away his wrath ; and may shun all grievous words, which stir up anger. When we speak of him, it should be as advantageously, as we can with truth ; concealing or qualifying his faults, and praising whatever is good in him. And, surely, he must be singularly bad, in whom we can find nothing to commend.

Again, we must perform for them all those good offices, which their necessities demand, and which our power can reach. "Do good to them that hate you. If our enemy hunger, we must feed him ; if he thirst, we must give him drink : so shall we heap coals of fire upon his head," to mollify his obdurate temper, and overcome his evil by our good ; not to aggravate his guilt and punishment, as some mistake the words : for, though that be many times the issue, yet ought it not to be any part of our design.

Lastly, because all that we can do for the good of enemies, signifies little, we must employ our interest in their behalf, in the court of heaven ; begging of God, that he would turn their hearts to himself, and to us ; that he would bless them, with the pardon of all their sins, particularly the wrongs they have done to ourselves ; and that he would give them all things necessary, for their present welfare or future happiness : " Pray for them that despitefully use you." And this will be the surest evidence of our charity to them. Mild words, may be designed as a snare to entrap them ; courtesy, may be shown them to gratify our vanity, or a generous kind of pride ; we may feel a certain delight, in having our enemy indebted to us, as knowing that it is more glorious in the eyes of the world, to raise a fallen adversary, than to trample on him. But it can be cheerful obedience to God's commands, and sincere love to our enemy, which alone, can induce us to take him into our

closets, and into our hearts ; which alone can share our prayers with him, and make him participate in the fruits of our devotion ; which alone can make us have the same regard for his interests as for our own, at once recommending them both, with equal fervour, to our heavenly Father.

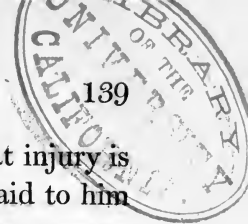
By this time, I hope, you understand the import of this precept, “ Love your enemies :” it remains, that we exhort you to the performance. I shall begin, then, with an argument, which may be of some force, to give the first assault to our rebellious inclinations, and to make way for further and more mild persuasions ; and this argument shall be, the indispensable necessity of the duty. We must not look upon this, as a matter which we may do or omit at pleasure ; nor as a counsel of perfection, highly commendable, but not absolutely necessary to salvation. It is as indispensably required, as any other duty of our religion ; and he who resolves not to obey in this instance, may renounce his baptism, and abandon Christianity. None can escape the obligation of the precept, unless he be so rarely fortunate, as to have no enemies ; nor must any think to redeem themselves from this duty, by any other performance. Let our opinions be never so orthodox, and our zeal in maintaining them, never so fervent ; let our prayers be never so frequent, and all our discourses eloquent and convincing ; let our attainments be never so great, and our confidence of salvation never so strong and undoubting ; yet, if

we refuse to obey this precept, we are not Christ's disciples : " Though I speak with the tongues of men and angels ; though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge ; though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor ; yea, though I give my body to be burned, and have not this charity," even to mine enemies, " it profiteth me nothing." And our Saviour himself tells us, in express terms, that unless we forgive men their trespasses, neither will God forgive us ours. Yea, he has taught us to pray for pardon, in such terms, as import a dreadful curse upon ourselves, if we are malicious and revengeful ; while we beg, that God would pardon us, *in the same manner*, that we pardon those who sin against us ; subscribing, as it were, with our own hands, and confirming out of our own mouths, that sentence which shall be pronounced against us : for *even so*, will God forgive us ; that is, he will take vengeance on us, if we have dealt so with others. And as those who do not love their enemies, beg their own condemnation in prayer, so also they eat and drink it, in the holy sacrament. And men are commonly so far convinced of this, that many chuse to keep back from the table of the Lord, that they may, the more freely, entertain their animosities. But, alas ! what a folly and madness this is ! Think they to excuse a sin, by the neglect of a duty ? Or can they put off death, as they put off the participation of the sacrament ? Or can they hope to be admitted into the eternal enjoyment of God, if they should die in

that malice, which renders them unfit to approach him, in that holy ordinance? Do not deceive yourselves : never shall any enter into those blessed mansions, those regions of peace and love, whose heart is not first inspired with charity, and softened into a compliance with this very precept. And it were as absurd, to think that a man may be malicious and revengeful all his days, and yet afterward go to heaven, there to learn meekness and charity, as to think that a man may be luxurious and dishonest in this world, and become temperate, and honest, and happy in the other. In a word, whatever shifts we may make to deceive ourselves, the command is clear and express, the sanction severe and peremptory ; we have but our choice of these two, love of enemies, or future condemnation.

Nor can this seem unreasonable, to any who considers, that God, the author of our natures, the creator of all our faculties, may justly rule our inclinations, and dispose of our love and affection. And yet he is content, if I may so speak, to bargain with us, and to buy off our natural, or rather our wicked and unnatural resentments ; offering us freedom from hell, his own mercy and favour, and everlasting happiness, on this, amongst other conditions, that we love our enemies.

Nay, further, the duty in itself is so reasonable, that the more sober of the Heathen, who had nothing above reason to teach them, have acknowledged it, if not as necessary, yet as highly becoming, and an eminent instance of a virtuous and



generous mind. Plato could say, ‘That injury is by no means to be done, nor to be repaid to him that has done it.’ When a malicious person said to Zeno, ‘Let me perish, if I do you not a mischief;’ his answer was, ‘Let me perish, if I do not reconcile you to me.’ Antoninus tells us frequently, ‘That all reasonable creatures are born for one another; and that it is the part of justice to bear with others: that it is through ignorance they offend us, as not knowing the right way to their own happiness; and therefore, we should rather instruct them better, than hate them: that the best kind of revenge is, not to become like them in wickedness and malice.’ And many other excellent arguments does that royal philosopher bring, to the same purpose. And Plutarch gives this, as one of the reasons why God is so slow in punishing wicked persons, ‘that we may learn meekness and patience by his example,’ adding that excellent observation, that ‘our greatest happiness and perfection consists in the imitation of our Maker.’

But to leave the testimonies of Heathen, the obligation of this precept of loving our enemies, may be deduced from another, which every man will acknowledge to be highly reasonable; the doing to others, what we would have done to ourselves. Every one of us desires, to be loved and cherished by mankind; to have our faults pardoned, our failings overlooked, and our necessities supplied. Or, if any be so haughty and stubborn, that they disdain a courtesy from an enemy, yet I hope there is

none so mad, as not to desire the favour of God ; whose hatred he deserves infinitely more, than the most bitter enemy can deserve his. How, then, can we think it unreasonable, to show that mercy to others, which ourselves expect and desire ? Can we look, that our master should forgive us ten thousand talents, if we take our fellow-servant by the throat, and hale him into prison for one hundred pence ? Or with what confidence can we say, Pardon our sins, unless we be willing to add, that we pardon those, who sin against us ? Certainly, if it be reasonable to seek pardon, it is just and equal to give it ; and nothing but blind selfishness, and extravagant partiality, can teach us to make so unreasonable a difference between ourselves and others.

Again, the reasonableness of this duty will farther appear, if we compare it with that malice and revenge, which it opposes. Can there be any thing more against natural reason, than to delight in an evil, which can bring no benefit to us ? Yet, this is the very nature and essence of revenge : for, if the damage we sustain can be repaired, it is no revenge to seek it ; and, if it cannot, it, in no degree, alleviates the evil of the accident, that we draw him who caused it, into as great a misery ; nay, unless we are unnatural, and without bowels, it will augment our trouble, to see any evil befall him. And he is a miserable person, indeed, whose delight is in mischief ; whose good is the evil of his neighbour. Yea, I may say, that he who returns an injury, is many times more unreasonable, than he who offered it : for he who first wrongs another,

has commonly some temptation of advantage by it; which revenge cannot pretend to. But if he has done it out of mere malice, yet he is not worse than the man who returns it. There is as much fantastic pleasure in spite, as in revenge: both are alike miserable and extravagant.

And who are they, against whom we bend our malice and revenge? Are they not men, partakers of the same nature, descended from the same stock with ourselves, fellow-citizens with us in this world, and with whom we should hope to live, for ever, in a better? And shall we not bear much, from those who are so nearly related to us? Nay more, they are the workmanship of God's hands, and, for any thing we know, either are, or may become, his children and friends: and dare we pretend any love to God, if we do not spare them, for his sake? And, lastly, if they have done us any real wrong, they are, in so far, foolish, and destitute of reason: and who would quarrel with a madman? Certainly, an injurious person knows not what he is doing: for he can never wound his neighbour, but through his own sides; nor prejudice another in a trifling interest, without hazarding his own eternal concernment; and, therefore, he deserves our pity, rather than our hatred.

Much more might be brought, to demonstrate the reasonableness of the duty to which our Saviour calls us in the text: but I hope what has been already said, may suffice to stop the mouths of malicious and revengeful men, who are ready to quarrel with it.

And, if this, or any other duty, appear to us absurd or unreasonable, we may learn the cause from the Apostle : “ The carnal man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God ; for they are foolishness to him.” * It is the carnality of our heart that makes it seem so ; and therefore, instead of disputing the duty, let us endeavour to purify our souls, and open the eyes of our mind ; and we shall find that to be true, which wisdom said of her doctrines : “ They are all plain, to him that understandeth ; and right to them that find knowledge.”

But, in the third place, the love of enemies is not only reasonable, but delightful ; it has a great deal of pleasure and sweetness in it. Of this, I confess, the greatest evidence must be had, from experience and practice ; the nature, even, of earthly pleasures being such, that the enjoyment, only, can make a man know them. But, though the full knowledge of this fact, require a nearer acquaintance, yet, even those who look at a distance, may perceive something of amiableness in the love of enemies ; especially, comparing it with the trouble and uneasiness, of that vice from which it would deliver us. Malice and revenge are the most restless and tormenting passions, that can possess the mind ; they keep it in continual hurry and disorder : they gnaw a man’s heart with anguish and vexation, and embitter all his enjoyments ; they mar the pleasures of the day, and interrupt the repose of the night. Solomon

* 1 Cor. ii. 14.

describes these men : “ They sleep not, except they have done mischief ; their sleep is taken away, except they cause some to fall.” *

On the other hand, the meek and peaceable man, whose mind is brought to a compliance with this precept, is above the malice of his enemies. It is not in their power to vex him. Amidst all the assaults of injuries and affronts, he is firm as a rock ; which no winds can shake, no waves remove. He is happy, in the calmness and serenity of his spirit ; and is sure, by his patience and friendly behaviour, either to convert, or shame his adversary. And then, the consciousness of performing his duty, and the assurance of future reward, afford him a pleasure, infinitely more pure and solid than any can expect, by indulging and gratifying their vengeful humour.

The advantages of this duty will more clearly appear, when we take a view of those prejudices, which commonly are entertained against it.

First, then, some cry out upon this precept, as enjoining impossibilities : as doing violence to the very constitution of nature ; as obliging men to a debt, that no man is able to pay. They will tell you, that it is as easy, to hate ourselves, as to love our enemies ; to love pain, as to bear an injury meekly : flesh and blood cannot endure it. What arrogance and presumption is this, thus to impeach the divine laws ! It is impossible ; therefore God should not have commanded it. Such is the rea-

* Prov. iv. 16.

soning. Were it not far more rational to argue thus? It is indispensably commanded, therefore it must needs be possible. And so it has been, to all good men that ever lived; and so it will be, by God's assistance, to all who make it their study. Flesh and blood cannot do it. True enough. But then take this into the account, Flesh and blood shall never enter into the kingdom of heaven. It is, indeed, against the propensities of our corrupt nature; but it is the work of Christians, to mortify their corruptions. And, if we think it impossible, at the command of God, and for the purchase of heaven, to love an enemy, and pardon an injury, how would we bear those hard trials, which Christians have suffered, by the cruelty of persecutors? Whether is it easier to suffer a wrong, or to give our body to be burned? Certainly, when we have obeyed this precept, we have not yet resisted unto blood; and, therefore, that obedience can never be impossible, since harder things may be expected from us. Therefore seriously set about the work, and endeavour to bring your minds to a compliance with it; and then, your own experience shall confute these idle pretences, and evince the possibility of the performance.

Another prejudice against this precept, is, that it seems to encourage injuries, by hopes of impunity and reward; giving the delinquent occasion to expect kindness and love, instead of the punishment which he deserves; and so, we should draw upon ourselves a second injury, by not requiting the first.

But we have already told you, that this precept does not forbid the exercise of justice, by those to whom the sword is committed, when the public security calls for it. As a parent may at once love and correct his child, so may a judge be in charity with the person whom he punishes. And, though it should be granted, that by pardoning injuries that are past, we expose ourselves to new ones, yet would this amount to no more, than our suffering hardships, by obedience to God; which, I hope, is not sufficient to dispense with our duty. But, truly, the fact stands not commonly thus: for, if we consult either our own observation, or the experience of others, we shall find, that meek and charitable persons are most seldom exposed to injuries, or engaged in troubles. He must needs be a desperately wicked person, who will offer a second injury, to one who has requited the first with kindness and love. Such a sweet disposition will mollify the hardest hearts, and charm the most froward humours; especially if we carry ourselves with such prudence and discretion, as may testify, that we are actuated by a noble and generous charity, not by a stupid insensibility. How often does a soft answer turn away wrath, and the overlooking of an injury prevent farther trouble; throwing water upon the spark, before it break forth into a flame? Hence, if we look upon meek and quiet persons, we shall ordinarily find them happy in the peace of their families, and in the favour and kindness of all their neighbours: whereas, the angry, quarrelsome,

and malicious person, is an eye-sore to all about him; his neighbours shun him, his servants dread him, and all abhor and avoid him. And therefore the observation of this precept of our Lord, is so far from exposing us to new injuries, that, by the mercy of God, it will prove the best means to secure our tranquillity. Peace shall be the reward of a peaceable temper.

But, lastly, some will tell us, that the love of enemies, and the pardoning of injuries, are inconsistent with the principles of honour; and will expose us to contempt and derision. But, alas! to what a sad pass are we come, if neither reason nor religion may prescribe the rules of honour; if our notions of it, must be taken from the language of the sons of Belial, of strife and violence; if, to imitate the Deity in his most glorious attribute of mercy and forgiveness, and to become perfect, as our Father which is in heaven is perfect, be accounted a base and dishonourable thing; and if, from this vain, imaginary, fantastic shadow of reputation, we will violate all laws, human and divine, and forfeit eternal happiness. But who are they, that will think the worse of you for your patience? Some vain empty fools, some profane atheistical wretches, whose judgments are not valuable, nor their praise worth having. Or what can they say of you, but that you are meek and lowly, imitators of that blessed Master, whom we profess to serve? And why do we own the name of Christians, if we be ashamed of the spirit and life of Christianity? Why

do we not call ourselves after the name of Cain, or Nimrod, or some other angry and revengeful destroyer, if we esteem those qualities more glorious and excellent? But, if we have any deference for so wise a man, and so great a king, as Solomon, he will tell us, that, “it is the honour of a man, to cease from strife;” and that “he who is slow to anger, is better than the mighty; and he who ruleth his spirit, better than he who taketh a city.”

Thus, you see how unreasonable those prejudices are, which keep men from the practice of this necessary duty. It remains, now, that we hint at some helps for its performance.

The heathen were pretty ingenious, in devising motives of patience. They would tell us, that ‘if we were newly offended, it was too soon to resent it; if long since, it was too late. If the offender be too strong for us, it were folly to contend; if he were too weak, it were a shame. Are we offended by a friend, let us remember our old friendship; if by an enemy, let us do him a kindness, and he will do so no more.’ But Christianity will direct us to better means, for composing the soul into the meekness and charity, which it requires.

The first I shall recommend, is humility. Let us learn to have low thoughts of ourselves; and then we shall both have fewer enemies, and be more inclined to love them. Pride and self-conceit make us over-rate every petty injury, and incline us to revenge: but, if we consider what poor con-

temptible things we are in ourselves, and what we have deserved, if not from men, yet from God, whose instruments they are for our correction, we shall be little concerned at what the world calls affronts, and easily reconciled to those who have wronged us.

Secondly, let us learn to have a low esteem of the present world, and all things therein; and this will cut off the occasions of our hatred and animosities. Men may wrong us in our fortune or reputation, but they cannot rob us of piety and virtue; of the favour of God, and eternal happiness. And therefore, if our minds be once raised above all transitory vanities, we cannot meet with injuries worth the resenting. If we aim at heaven, and the glory of another world, we shall not stand to quarrel and contend, about any trifling interest in our way thither.

Thirdly, the frequent and serious thoughts of death, would conduce much to allay our hatred, and dispose us to meekness and charity. Naturalists tell us, that when swarms of bees fight in the air, they are dispersed by throwing dust among them.* Did we, in our thoughts, often reflect upon that dust to which we must all shortly return, we should more easily lay down our quarrels, and animosities. While we contend about small things, little do we consider, that death is coming on apace, and will swallow up the victor and the van-

* 'Hi motus animorum, atque hæc certamina tanta
Pulveris exigui jactu compressa quiescent.'

Virg. Georg. iv. 86. — Ed.

quished ; him that is in the right, and him that is in the wrong. Look back upon the private contentions, or public commotions, which infested the world an hundred years ago. Where are they who managed them ? They are all gone down into the dark and silent grave. Death has decided their controversies, and within a few days it will do so with ours, and send us all to plead our cause, before our great Judge ; and it will go ill with us, if we appear there in malice. Therefore, why should our hatred be long, since our life is so short ? One would think we should find better employment, for the short time we have to spend here.

But, lastly, and above all, let us propose to ourselves the blessed example of the holy Jesus : “ who, when he was reviled, reviled not again ; when he suffered, threatened not ; but committed himself to Him, that judgeth righteously.”

Let us frequently remember, what great things he has done and suffered, for us poor sinful wretches ; even while we were enemies and rebels to him ; how, in all the passages of his life, and throughout the bloody scene of his sufferings, he was actuated by that same charity and love to his enemies, which he calls for at our hands. It was this, which moved him to descend from heaven, and clothe himself with the frailties of our nature, and endure the troubles of a calamitous life, and the pains of a bitter death, — to deliver us from that eternal misery, into which we had plunged ourselves. And shall not his goodness and mercy to us, mollify our

hearts, and overpower the corruption of our revengeful nature, and inspire us with earnest desires and resolutions to imitate his blessed example? After all that he has done and suffered for us, can we be guilty of such a shameful ingratitude, as to deny him this poor satisfaction and acknowledgment, to pardon an enemy for his sake? Has he died for us, when we were his enemies, and shall we refuse to live at peace with ours? Remember, with what patience, he endured the contradiction of sinners against himself; with what humility, he condescended to wash the feet of him, who was, at the same time, resolved to betray him; with what mildness, he bare the supine negligence and stupidity of his disciples, who slept in the time of his agony. What charity and meekness did he evince, towards those who sought his life! He could have called for legions of angels to destroy them, or made the earth to open her mouth and swallow them up: but he would not employ his miraculous power, save only for their good; restoring a servant's ear, and reproving the preposterous zeal of him who cut it off. Yea, while he hung upon the cross, and was approaching to the gates of death, all the cruel pains of body, and far more intolerable pressure of spirit, which he then sustained, did not lessen his tenderness and affection for his murderers: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." Let us be frequent and serious in the meditation of these things. And, if we have any veneration for the example of our

Saviour, and any sense of his infinite mercy, this will dispose us to the practice of his precepts, and the obedience of his laws ; and particularly to the observation of this necessary, this reasonable, this delightful duty, that we love our enemies.

SERMON III.

THE NECESSITY AND ADVANTAGE OF EARLY AFFLICTIONS.

LAM. III. 27, 28.

It is good for a man, that he bear the yoke in his youth. He sitteth alone and keepeth silence, because he hath borne it upon him.

THE great difference between the maxims of the world, and those which religion proposes, is in nothing more observable, than in taking the measures of happiness and felicity. The world accounts him a happy man, who enjoys a perpetual calm and sunshine of prosperity; whose pleasant and joyful days are never overcast with any cloud, nor his tranquillity interrupted by any disastrous accident; who was never acquainted with any other change, but that which brought him the new and fresh relish of succeeding pleasures and enjoyments. But religion has taught us to look upon this, as a condition full of danger; much more to be pitied than envied; to be feared, than to be desired. It has taught us, to consider afflictions as instances of the divine goodness, as tokens and pledges of his love; for “whom the Lord loveth, he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he

receiveth ;” and these severe dispensations are very necessary, and may prove useful and advantageous : “Blessed is the man,” saith the Psalmist, “whom thou chastenest, O Lord ;” * “It is good for me, that I have been afflicted ; that I may learn thy statutes.” † And the Prophet in the text, “It is good for a man, that he bear the yoke in his youth.” He was, at this time, loaded with the heaviest weight of trouble and sorrow ; what for the public calamities of his nation, and what for his own particular sufferings : “His eyes were running down with rivers of water, for the destructions of the daughter of his people ;” they trickled down, and ceased not. Judah was gone into captivity because of affliction : she dwelt among the Heathen, and found no rest ; all her persecutors overtook her in the straits. The ways of Zion mourned, because none came to the solemn feasts ; the young and the old, were lying on the ground in the streets ; the virgins and young men, were fallen by the sword ; and the few that remained, were starving for hunger. The people sighed, and sought bread ; they gave their pleasant things, for meat to relieve their soul ; the children and sucklings swooned in the streets, their soul was poured out into their mother’s bosom ; the women ate their fruit, their children of a span long. And the Prophet had a large share in these calamities, both by his own interest, and by his compassion towards

* Psalm xciv. 12.

† Psalm cxix. 71.

his neighbour: "I am the man," saith he, "that hath seen affliction, by the rod of his wrath. Surely against me is he turned; he turneth his hand against me all the day."

But, after he had thus bemoaned himself, and given some vent to his passion and sorrow, he puts a stop to the current that was grown too impetuous, and turns his thoughts another way. He acknowledges the justice of God's dispensations; and that it was a favour they suffered no more: — "This I recall into my mind, therefore have I hope. It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning." Nay, when he had further pondered the matter, he finds himself indebted to the goodness of God, even for the afflictions he endured: "It is good for a man, that he bear the yoke in his youth."

The bearing of the yoke is an easy and obvious metaphor, importing the restraint of liberty; when our desires are denied, and we have not our wills, and cannot ramble up and down as we please: and also, the pressure of afflictions, which gall and torment us, under which we smart and groan. Such is the yoke, which the Prophet tells us, it is good for a man that he bear. A strange doctrine indeed to flesh and blood; and how few there are that believe it! We judge of things, by their outward appearance, and as they affect us at present: "Now no affliction or chastening seemeth, for the present, to be joyous,

but grievous ;” * and we cannot persuade ourselves, that there is any good, in that which we feel to be troublesome and unpleasant. But, if we consult our reason and our faith, they will soon bring us to the acknowledgment of this truth, that “affliction cometh not forth of the dust, neither doth trouble spring out of the ground.” The crosses with which we meet, are not the effects of blind chance ; but the results of a wise and unerring providence ; which knows what is fittest for us, and loves us far better than we can love ourselves. There is no malice or envy lodged in the bosom of that blessed being, whose name and nature is love. He takes no delight in the troubles and miseries of his creatures : “He doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men.” It were infinitely unworthy of his wisdom and goodness, to please himself, in seeing such poor creatures as we are, tossed up and down in the world ; to behold our anguish, and hear our groans. It is our happiness and welfare which he designs, in all his dispensations ; and he makes choice of the most proper and effectual means for that end. He sees us wandering out of the way, ready to ruin and undo ourselves : and first he essays to reduce us, by milder and more gentle methods ; he tries our gratitude and ingenuity, by all the endearments of mercy and goodness ; he draws us with the cords of love, with the bands of a man. But, if we break all these bands asunder,

* Heb. xii. 11.

and cast away these cords from us ; if we abuse his goodness, and turn his grace into wantonness ; then, not only his justice, but his love, not only his hatred to sin, but his affection for us, will oblige him to alter his method, and take the rod in his hand, and try what severity can do. God's design in afflicting us, is excellently expressed by the author to the Hebrews : " He chasteneth us for our profit, that we may be partakers of his holiness." Holiness is the highest perfection, and greatest happiness, of which we are capable : it is a real participation of the divine nature, the image of God drawn on the soul ; and all the chastisements with which we meet, are designed to reduce us to this blessed temper, to make us like unto himself ; and thereby, capable of being happy with him, to all eternity. This will more clearly appear, if we reflect on the natural temper of our minds, and the influence which prosperous or adverse fortune is wont to have upon them.

And, first, we are naturally proud and self-conceited ; we have a high esteem of ourselves, and would have every body else value and esteem us. This disease is very deeply rooted in our fallen nature : it is, ordinarily, the first sin, that betrays itself in the little actions and passions of children ; and, frequently, the last which religion enables us to overcome. And such is its malignity, that it renders us odious and vile, in the sight both of God and man. It cannot but be infinitely displeasing to that great and glorious Ma-

jesty, to see such silly creatures, whom he brought forth out of nothing, who are every moment ready to return into nothing again, and who have nothing of their own but folly, and misery, and sin, — to see such creatures, either so blind as to value themselves, or so unreasonable as to desire others to value them. Good men must needs hate us for it, because God does so; and evil men hate us for it, because they are themselves proud, and therefore, are jealous of the attempts of others at self-exaltation, as tending to depress and diminish them. Pride alone, is the source and fountain of almost all the disorders in the world; of all our troubles, and of all our sins. And we shall never be truly happy, or truly good, till we come to think nothing of ourselves, and be content that all the world think nothing of us. Now, nothing has a more natural tendency to foment and heighten this natural corruption, than constant prosperity and success. The Psalmist, speaking of the prosperity of the wicked, who are not in trouble as others, neither are they plagued like other men, presently subjoins the effect, — “Therefore pride compasseth them about, as a chain.”* Sanctified afflictions contribute to abate and mortify the pride of our hearts, to lance the swelling imposthume, to make us sensible of our weakness, and convince us of our sins. Thus “doth God open the ears of men, and seal their instruction, that he may with-

* Psalm lxxiii. 6.

draw man from his purpose, and hide pride from man.* And if they be bound in fetters, and be holden in cords of affliction; then he sheweth them their work, and their transgressions that they have exceeded.”† Afflictions put us on the search, both to find out the offences by which we have provoked God, and to make us more sensible of the heinousness and malignity of their nature: “I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself thus, Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised, as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke: turn thou me, and I shall be turned; for thou art the Lord my God. Surely, after I was chastised I repented; and after I was instructed, I smote upon my thigh: I was ashamed, yea, even confounded, because I did bear the reproach of my youth.”‡

Another distemper of our minds, is our too great affection to the world, and worldly things. We are too apt to set our hearts wholly upon them; to take up our rest, and seek our happiness and satisfaction in them. But, though they may well divert and amuse awhile, they can never satisfy, or make us happy; the souls which He made for Himself, can never rest, till they return unto Him:§ and, therefore, he often finds it necessary, either to remove our comforts, or embitter them; to put aloes and wormwood on the breasts of the world,

* Job, xxxiii. 16, 17.

† Job, xxxvi. 8, 9.

‡ Jer. xxxi. 18, 19.

§ ‘Fecisti nos ad te, Domine; et inquietum est cor nostrum, donec requiescat in te.’ — *S. Augustin.* — ED.

that thereby we may wean ourselves from it; and finally we may be carried to the end of our being, the fountain of blessedness and felicity. The few and little comforts of this life, notwithstanding all the troubles and crosses with which they are interlarded, are apt to keep the hearts, even of good men, in too great love of this world. What would become of us, if our whole life were altogether prosperous and contenting, without any intermixture of crosses and afflictions? It is too probable, we should never look any farther; but conclude, with Peter on the mount of transfiguration, "Lord, it is good for us to be here." As Almighty God hath a very great affection to us, so he is very desirous of our love; not that it brings any advantage to him, but because it is our greatest happiness and perfection. He bestows his mercies, to gain our hearts: but when we begin to idolize the gifts, and forget the giver, he becomes jealous, and takes them away, that he may not have any rival in our affection. And, certainly, it is no small advantage, to have our hearts, in any measure, loosened from the world, disentangled from every thing here below. He makes a good purchase, who obtains this privilege, let it cost him never so dear. *

Another bad effect, which prosperity is wont to produce in our corrupt nature, is, that it makes us forgetful of God, and unthankful for his mercies.

* 'Quocunque pretio, bene emitur.'

When second causes answer our expectations and desires, we are seldom wont to look beyond them: we never regard the fountain, till the cisterns begin to fail. This it was, that made Agur pray against a plentiful fortune, “lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the Lord?” When the weather is fair, and the sails are filled with a prosperous gale, the rough and stubborn mariners are seldom at their devotion; but when the storm is risen, and the sea begins to swell, and every wave threatens to devour them, “then they call to the Lord in their trouble,” as on him who can alone “deliver them out of their distress.” The Psalmist, speaking to the Jews of their stiff-necked and rebellious predecessors, says, that “when God slew them, then they sought him; they remembered that God was their rock, and the high God their redeemer.” * — “In their affliction,” saith the Lord, by the Prophet, “they will seek me early.” † I doubt not, a great many devout persons will acknowledge, that it was some affliction or other which first taught them to pray. And, as afflictions contribute to make us remember our dependence on God, and then excite us to seek unto him; so also, they render us more sensible of our obligations to him, and more thankful for the mercies which he has bestowed on us. We are so dull and insensible, that we seldom value any of the divine mercies, till we find what it is to want them. We put very little value on our food and raiment, and

* Psalm lxxviii. 34, 35. † Hosea, v. 15.

the ordinary means of our subsistence, unless we have been sometimes pinched with want. We consider not, how much we are indebted to God for preserving our friends, till some of them be removed from us. How little do we prize our health, if we have never had experience of sickness or pain? Where is the man, who seriously blesses God for his nightly quiet and repose? And yet, if sickness or trouble deprive us of them, we then find them to have been a great and invaluable mercy, and that it is God who giveth his beloved sleep.

Once more, prosperity renders us insensible of the miseries and calamities of others. Those “who were at ease in Zion, did not grieve for the afflictions of Joseph.” But afflictions soften the heart, and make it more tender and kindly; and we are always most ready to compassionate those griefs, which ourselves have sometime endured: the sufferings of others make the deepest impressions upon us, when they put us in mind of our own. It is mentioned, as a powerful motive to engage the children of Israel to be kind and merciful to strangers, that “they knew the heart of a stranger, having been strangers themselves in Egypt.” Now, this tender and compassionate temper well becomes a Christian, whose duty it is, to weep with those that weep, and to have as deep a sense and feeling of the griefs of others, as he is wont to have of his own.

These and many more advantages, do sanctified and well-improved afflictions bring to a Christian;

on account of which, "it is good for him, that he hath borne the yoke." But I hasten to that which is mentioned in the text. Only, by the way, that I may not need to return, let me here take notice of the season which is here mentioned, as fittest for a man to bear affliction: "It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth."

We are all willing to put off the evil day; and, if we must needs bear the yoke, we would choose to have it delayed, till we grow old. We think it sad, to have our morning overcast with clouds, to meet with a storm, before we have well launched forth from the shore. We are wont to indulge and applaud children and young folks, in their frolics and jovial humours; we tell them they will have time enough for cares and troubles, when they grow older; we turn that irony of Solomon's into a serious advice, "Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth, and walk in the ways of thy heart, and the sight of thine eyes." But the divine wisdom, which knows what is fit for us, often makes choice of our younger years, as the most proper to accustom us to the bearing of the yoke. And a little consideration will make us discover the advantages of this season, for suffering afflictions; they being, at that time, most necessary, most tolerable, and most advantageous. First, I say, they are then most necessary. For youth is the time of our life which implies the greatest danger of our running into wild and extravagant courses: our blood is then hot, and our spirits unstayed and giddy; we have too much pride, to be

governed by others; and too little wisdom, to govern ourselves. The yoke is, then especially, needful to tame our wildness, and reduce us to a due staydness and composure of mind. Then also, it is most supportable. The body, is strong and healthful, less apt to be affected with the troubles of the mind; the spirit, stout and vigorous, will not so easily break, and sink under them. Old age is a burthen, and will soon faint under any supervenient load. The smallest trouble, is enough to bring down grey hairs with sorrow to the grave. And therefore, since we must meet with afflictions, it is, certainly, a favourable circumstance to have them, at that time of our life, when we are most able to endure them. And lastly, the lessons which afflictions teach us, are then most advantageous, when we learn them betimes; that we may have the use of them, in the conduct of our after lives. An early engagement in the ways of religion is a great felicity; and the means by which this is to be effected, can never be too soon administered. Youth is more soft and pliable, and evil dispositions are more easily cured, before time and custom have hardened us in them. A tree needs little force to bend it, when it is young; and there needs the less of the rod, if the child be brought under discipline betimes. And thus, on many accounts, "it is good for a man, to bear the yoke in his youth."

We proceed, to the particular advantage of afflictions, which is mentioned in the text: "He sitteth

alone and keepeth silence, because he hath borne it upon him." The words are capable of a twofold interpretation; and both meanings suit well with the purpose: for, we may either understand them properly, of solitude and silence; or metaphorically, of patience and quiet submission; both of which are the good effects of sanctified and well-improved afflictions: and, accordingly, we shall say something to both.

Nature has made us sociable creatures; but corruption has carried this inclination to excess: so that most persons think it an intolerable burthen, to be, for any considerable time, alone. Though they love themselves out of measure, yet they cannot endure their own conversation; they had rather be hearing, and discoursing of, the most naughty and trivial things, than be sitting alone, and holding their peace. Outward prosperity heightens this humour. When the heart is dilated with joy, it seeks to vent itself, in every company. When a man is free from trouble and cares, he thinks of nothing but how to please himself, with variety of diversions and conversations. Crosses, on the other hand, render a man pensive and solitary: they stop the mouth, and bind up the tongue, and incline the person to be much alone. Sadness makes his company disagreeable to others, and he finds theirs as little agreeable to him: "He sitteth alone and keepeth silence, because he hath borne it upon him." Thus the same prophet said, "I sat not in the assembly of the

mockers, nor rejoiced: I sat alone, because of thine hand.”*

Now, he who considers, on the one hand, the guilt which we are wont to contract, and the prejudice which we sustain, by too much conversation with others, and, on the other hand, the excellent improvement which we may make, of solitude and retirement, will account it a good effect of afflictions, that they dispose us to be alone. In considering the evils of frequent conversation, we are not to prosecute the grosser and more scandalous vices of the tongue. It might seem a poor commendation of solitude and silence, that a man is not swearing, or lying, or scolding, or talking profanely, when he is alone; a man may converse enough, and keep himself free from these. We rather chuse to mention such evils, as are wont to be less noticed, and can be with more difficulty avoided.

And, first, experience may teach us, that much conversation ordinarily begets a remissness and dissolution of spirit; that it slackens and relaxes the bent of our minds; and disposes us to softness and easy compliances. We find it hard enough, at any time, to compose our spirits to that staydness and severity which religion requires; but, if we be too much in company, it is almost impossible to maintain it. That cheerfulness and complaisance, which are judged necessary to render conversation agreeable, easily degenerate into levity and

* Jer. xv. 17.

sin : and we are very ready to displease our Maker, when we are too intent on pleasing our friends. This loose frame and dissipation of mind, which society occasions, made a wise man complain, that he always came out of company less a man.*

Another prejudice which we receive from society, is, that it fills our minds with noxious images, and fortifies our corrupt notions and opinions of things. Our hearts are naturally too much addicted to the things of the world ; we regard them too much, and place too high a value upon them : and the discourses which we hear, redouble the temptation, by bringing them continually into our thoughts, and setting them off to the greatest advantage. When we are alone, in a sober temper, and take time to reflect and consider of things, we are sometimes persuaded of the vanity and worthlessness of all those glittering trifles, by which the generality of mankind are so sadly bewitched : but, when we come abroad, and listen to the common talk, and hear people speak of greatness, and riches, and honour, with concern and admiration, we quickly forget our more sober and deliberate thoughts, and suffer ourselves to be carried away, with the stream of the common opinion. And, though the effects be not so sudden and observable, yet these discourses are still making some secret and insensible impressions upon us.

Thus, also, is our judgment corrupted, about

* ‘*Ex hominum consortio, semper venio minus homo.*’—
Seneca.

the qualities and endowments of the mind. Courage and gallantry, wit and eloquence, and other accomplishments of this nature, are magnified and extolled beyond all measure: whereas, humility, and meekness, and devotion, and all those Christian graces which render a soul truly excellent and lovely, are spoken of as mean and contemptible things: for, though men have not the impudence formally to make the comparison, and prefer the former; yet, their very air, and way of discoursing about these things, sufficiently testifies their opinion. With what affection and concernment will they represent a gallant or learned man; but how faintly do they utter the character of a good man! And so, in censuring men's failings, they exaggerate the smallest instances of weakness or imprudence, but speak lightly enough of the greatest crimes. Drunkenness and impurity are mentioned in such terms, as express little sense of their heinous nature, and tend to lessen the horror, in which we should hold them. Ambition and revenge, and such other plausible vices, are rather allowed than condemned. And, while we converse in the world, and are accustomed to such representations of things, our judgments are, thereby, exceedingly corrupted, and we entertain false and pernicious maxims. And, so hard it is to guard ourselves against the contagion, that we had better sit alone and keep silence, than be continually exposed to the temptation.

I shall mention but another of those evils, with which our conversation is commonly attended. The

most ordinary subject of our entertainments are the faults and follies of others. We meet, and talk, and fall to describe the life and deportment of others.* Were this one theme of discourse discharged, we should often find but little to say. I scarcely know any fault, of which, good persons are so frequently guilty, and so little sensible. They know, perhaps, the truth of the things asserted, and they have no malicious design in reporting them; they tell them, only as they do the public news, to divert themselves, and gratify their friends. But, would we consult our own hearts, and apply the great rule of righteousness, of doing unto others as we would be done unto ourselves, we should soon be convinced that there is much more guilt and sinfulness in such discourses, than we are ready to apprehend. How ill do we take it, to have our own failings thus exposed, and to hear, that any person has made as bold with us, as we are wont to make with others? Again, how unwilling would we be, that the persons of whom we speak so freely, should overhear our discourse, or be informed of it? Now, if the practice had nothing blameable in it, why should we be so shy to avow it?

I have only hinted at these things: but he who shall seriously ponder them, will acknowledge, that there is no little mischief, even in those entertainments, which pass for very innocent in the world; and that he shuns much guilt, and

* 'Itur in verba, sermo seritur, vita aliena describitur.'

many snares; who sits alone and keeps silence. But solitude and retirement not only deliver us from these inconveniences, but also afford very excellent opportunities for bettering our souls. Those hours which we mispend, in needless visits, and idle talk, if rightly improved, might set us a great way forward, on our journey to heaven. While we are too busy, in making or entertaining acquaintance with men, we often fall out of acquaintance, both with God and ourselves.

The most profane and irreligious persons, will find some serious thoughts rise in their minds, if they be much alone. And the more any person is advanced in piety and goodness, the more will he delight in retirement, and the more benefit will he receive from it. Then it is, that the devout soul takes its highest flight in divine contemplations, and makes its nearest approaches to God. I find the vulgar Latin renders the words of the text *, “ The solitary person will sit still and hold his peace, because he has lifted himself up, above himself; ” has raised his spirit, above his ordinary pitch. † ‘ In solitude,’ says one of the fathers, ‘ we breathe, as it were, in a purer air, heaven is more open unto us, and God is more familiar and frequent in his visits.’ To which purpose, some have applied that passage of the Prophet Hosea, “ Behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and there speak comfortably unto her; ” or, as the ori-

* “ *Sedebit solitarius et tacebit, quia levavit se, supra se.* ”

† ‘ *In solitudine, aer purior, cœlum apertius, familiarior Deus.* ’

ginal imports, ‘I will speak unto her heart.’ That rule which our Saviour gives for our devotion, to enter into our closet, and shut the door behind us, is as necessary to preserve us from distraction, as from vanity and ostentation. When we have retired as much as we can from the world, we still carry too much of it along with us. The images of things sufficiently persecute and disturb us, though we be not exposed to the objects themselves. Our blessed Saviour thought not the mountains and deserts retired enough for his devotions; but would add the darkness and silence of the night. Little does the world understand those secret and hidden pleasures, which devout souls feel, when, having got out of the noise and hurry of the world, they sit alone and keep silence, contemplating the divine perfections, which shine so conspicuously in all his works of wonder; admiring his greatness, and wisdom, and love, and revolving his favours towards themselves; opening before him their griefs and their cares, and disburthening their souls into his bosom: protesting their allegiance and subjection unto him, and telling him a thousand times that they love him; and then, listening unto the voice of God within their hearts, that still and quiet voice, which is not wont to be heard in the streets, that they may hear what God the Lord will speak: for he will speak peace unto his people, and to his saints; and will visit them, with the expressions of his love. No wonder, if those blessed souls who have tasted the pleasures of holy retirement, and found

themselves, as it were, in the suburbs of heaven, grow weary of company and affairs, and long for the returning of those happy hours, as the hireling for the shades of the evening : no wonder they pity the foolish busy world, who spend their days in vanity, and know not what it is indeed to live.

But here I would not be mistaken, as if I recommended a total and constant retirement, or persuaded men to forsake the world, and betake themselves unto deserts. No, certainly ; we must not abandon the stations wherein God hath placed us, nor render ourselves useless to mankind. Solitude has its temptations, and we may sometimes be very bad company to ourselves. It was not without reason, that one wise man warned another, who professed to delight in conversing with himself, ‘Have a care, that you be keeping company with a good man.’* Abused solitude may whet men’s passions, and irritate their desires, and prompt them to things which company would restrain. And this made one say, that ‘he who is much alone, must either be a saint or a devil.’ Melancholy, which inclines men most to retirement, is often too much nourished and fomented by it ; and there is a peevish and sullen loneliness, which some people affect under their troubles, whereby they feed on discontented thoughts, and find a kind of perverse pleasure in refusing to be comforted. But all this says no more, but that good things may be abused :

* ‘Vide, ut cum homine probo.’

that excess or disorder may turn the most wholesome food into poison. And therefore, though I would not indifferently recommend much solitude unto all ; yet, surely, I may say, it were good for the most part of men, that they were less in company, and more alone.

Thus much of the first, and proper sense, of sitting alone, and keeping silence. We told you it might also import, a quiet and patient submission to the will of God ; the laying of our hand on our mouth, that no expression of murmur or discontent may escape us : “ I was dumb,” said the Psalmist, “ I opened not my mouth, because thou didst it.”* And the prophet describes our Saviour’s patience, that “ he was oppressed, and was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth : he was brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before the shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth.”† Indeed, a modest and unaffected silence, is a good way to express our submission to the hand of God, under afflictions. The heathen moralists, who pretended much to patience, could never hold their peace ; but desired always, to signalize themselves, by some fetches of wit, and expressions of unusual courage. But, certainly, the mute and quiet Christian behaves himself much better. That eloquent and expressive silence says more, than all their vain and stoical boastings. We cannot now insist, at any length, on this Christian duty, of patience, and

* Psalm xxxix. 9.

† Isaiah, liii. 7.

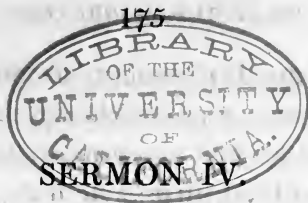
submission to the will of God; we shall only say two things of it, which the text imports. First, That this lesson is most commonly learned, in the school of afflictions: “He sitteth alone and keepeth silence, because he hath borne it upon him.” In that forecited place of Jeremiah*, Ephraim bemoaning himself, acknowledges “that he had been as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke;” which makes the greater reluctancy against it. Children that are much indulged, are the more impatient if they come to be crossed; and there too much of the child in us all. The Apostle tells us, that “tribulation worketh patience.”† Custom makes every thing more tolerable; and, if it please God to sanctify the first stroke, the second is received with the greater submission. The other thing which I have to say on this duty, is, that this advantage of afflictions is very great and desirable; that it is, indeed, very good for a man to have borne the yoke in his youth, if he has thereby learned to sit alone and keep silence, when the hand of the Lord is upon him. There is nothing more acceptable unto God, no object more lovely and amiable in his eyes, than a soul thus prostrate before him, thus entirely resigned to his holy will, thus quietly submitting to his severest dispensations. Nor is it less advantageous to ourselves: it sweetens the bitterest occurrences of our life, and makes us feel an inward and secret pleasure,

* Ch. xxxi. 18.

† Romans, v. 3.

notwithstanding all the smart of affliction : so that the yoke becomes supportable ; the rod itself comforts us ; and we find much more delight in suffering the will of God, than if he had granted us our own.

Now, to this God, who loveth us, and correcteth us for our profit, that we may be partakers of his holiness, and thereby of his happiness, — to Him, Father, Son, and blessed Spirit, be all honour, praise, and glory, now and for ever. *Amen.*



THAT THERE ARE BUT A SMALL NUMBER SAVED.

LUKE, XIII. 23.

Then said one unto him, Lord, are there few that be saved?

THOSE who have so much charity and goodness, as to be nearly touched with the interests of mankind, cannot but be, more especially, concerned about their everlasting condition; and very anxious to know what shall become of poor mortals, when this scene is over; when they shall cease to appear on the stage of the world, being called off to give an account of their deportment on it. And, since we are assured, that there are different, and very opposite, states of departed souls, some being admitted into happiness, and others doomed to misery, beyond any thing that we can conceive, this may suggest a farther inquiry: how is mankind likely to be divided? shall heaven or hell have the greater share? Such a laudable curiosity as this, it was, that induced one of our blessed Saviour's followers to propose the question in the text, "Lord, are there few that be saved?"

Our Saviour had been lately foretelling the great success the gospel should have: how, like a little

leaven, that quickly ferments the whole mass into which it is received, Christianity should soon propagate itself through the world, and many nations should embrace the profession of it. This disciple, it seems, was desirous to know, whether the efficacy should be answerable to the extent? Whether it should take as deep root in the hearts of those that owned it, as it was to spread itself far and wide, on the face of the earth? In a word, whether the greater part of men were to be saved by it? I called this a laudable curiosity; and there is reason to think it is so, since our Saviour himself, who best knew the occasion and import of it, does not check, but satisfy the inquiry; which he was not wont to do, when the questions were useless or blameable. Those who inquired into the time of the general judgment, received no other account, but that it was among those secrets which God reserved for himself. And, again, when they asked of the time that the kingdom should be restored unto Israel, he tells them plainly, it was not for them, it concerned them not at all, to know such things as these. But here, as the question seems to have proceeded from zeal for the honour of God, and concern in the happiness of mankind; so its resolution might be very useful: and accordingly it is improved by our Saviour; who, at once, resolves the doubt, and presses a very weighty exhortation, in the following words:—
“ Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.”

We are not, at this time, to prosecute the whole import of this latter verse; for that, we refer you to an excellent sermon, entitled, *The Way to Happiness*. We shall only consider the answer, which is implied in it, to the foregoing question; namely, that the number of those who are to be saved, is really small.

On this point, we design to fix our meditations, at this time. And, indeed, there is scarcely any doctrine that needs to be more inculcated: for, amongst all the stratagems, by which the great enemy of mankind plots and contrives their ruin, few are more unhappily successful, than the fond persuasion, that heaven and everlasting happiness are easily attainable. What one says of wisdom, we may, with a little alteration, apply to this purpose; that many might have reached heaven, if they had not been confident of doing so.* The doors of the Christian church are now very wide, and men have access to them upon very easy terms. Nay, this privilege descends to men by their birth, and they are reckoned among Christians, before they well know what the term means. The ordinances and mysteries of our religion are common to all, save those whom gross ignorance, or notorious crimes, exclude. There are no marks on the foreheads of men, whereby we can judge of their future condition; they die, and are laid in their graves, and none come back to tell how it fares with them; and we

* ‘Multi ad sapientiam pervenissent, nisi putâssent se pervenisse.’

desire to think the best of every particular person. But, whatever charity be in this, there is little prudence in the inference which many draw from it; who think, that they may live as their neighbours do, and die as happily as they; and, since the greatest part of men are such as themselves, that heaven must be a very empty place, if all of them be debarred. Thus, perhaps, you have seen a flock of sheep on a bridge, and the first leaps over, and the rest, not knowing what is become of those that went before, each of them follow their companions into that hazard or ruin. Interest and self-love so strongly blind the minds of men, that they can hardly be withheld from the belief of that, which they would very fain have true. Hence it is, that, notwithstanding all we are told to the contrary, the opinion of the broadness of the way that leads to heaven, and the easy access to it, is still the most epidemic, and, I think, the most dangerous heresy. Many of the commonalty are so ignorant, as to avow it; and the strange security of more knowing persons, as loudly proclaims it. I know he undertakes an unwelcome errand, who goes about to dispossess the minds of men, of such a pleasant and flattering error. But what shall we do? Shall we suffer them to sleep on and take their rest, till the everlasting flames awake them? Shall we draw their blood on our heads, and involve ourselves in their ruin, by neglecting to advertize them of their hazard? No, my friends: duty obliges, and the holy Scriptures warrant us, to assure you, that

there are few that shall be saved ; that “ the whole world lieth in wickedness,”* and that “ they are a little flock, to whom the Father will give the kingdom.”†

That this certain, though lamentable truth, may make deeper impression on our minds, we shall, first, propose some considerations, for the better understanding what great things are required, in those who look for everlasting happiness ; and then, we shall reflect on the actions and ways of men ; that, comparing the one with the other, we may see how little ground of hope there is, for the greatest part to build on.

First, then, consider the nature of that divine Majesty, whose presence and enjoyment it is, that makes heaven desirable ; and think how inconsistent it is with his infinite holiness, to admit impure and impenitent sinners into the habitation of his glory. Certainly, “ he is of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on iniquity.”‡ “ He is not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness : neither shall evil dwell with Him. The foolish shall not stand in his sight.”§ It is strange what conceptions foolish men entertain of Almighty God ; imagining, that those who have been all their days wallowing in sin, shall be admitted into an everlasting fellowship with Him. Sooner shall light and darkness dwell together, and heat and cold, in their greatest violence, combine, and all

* 1 John v. 19.

† Hab. i. 13.

‡ Luke xii. 32.

§ Psalm v. 4, 5.

contrarities of nature be reconciled. Can two walk together, except they be agreed? Can there be any converse, between those whose natures suit so ill together? Surely, they who think so easily to attain happiness, must imagine God altogether such a one as themselves; else they could never hope, that he would chuse them, and cause them to approach unto him. But how widely shall they find themselves mistaken, when he shall reprove them, and set their sins in order before them: and they shall discover to their confusion, that he is a “consuming fire, to all the workers of iniquity!” Men are wont to frame a notion of God, according to their own wishes, as if he were but an empty name: and this is the common shelter, against every convincing reproof. But this temerity shall, at length, sufficiently confute itself; and men shall feel that justice, which they will not believe. There is not strife among the attributes of God; that one of them should swallow up another. Mercy is open to all, who forsake their sins; but justice shall seize on those, who continue in them. That compassion, which made God to give his dear Son for the redemption of mankind, will never prevail for the pardon and deliverance of any impenitent sinner. Abused goodness will certainly turn into fury; and infinite mercy, being despised, shall bring down upon sinners all the dreadful effects of an omnipotent vengeance.

Consider, secondly, what that happiness is, which all men so confidently promise to themselves; and

see, whether it be likely, that it should be so easily attained. Glorious things are every where spoken, of that heavenly Jerusalem; and all that is excellent or desirable in this world, is borrowed to shadow it forth in the holy Scriptures: we are told of crowns, and kingdoms, and treasures, and rivers of pleasure, and fountains of living waters, and of an exceeding eternal weight of glory.

But, thirdly, all these, do not suffice to convey into our minds any full apprehension, of the happiness we expect; and, after all that can be said, it does not yet appear what we shall be. These metaphors and allegories serve but to assist our minds a little, and give us some confused apprehensions of the things which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard; nor, said that beloved disciple who lay in the bosom of our Saviour, can it enter into the heart of men to conceive, what God hath prepared for them that love him. Can we, then, expect that so glorious a prize shall be gained without any labour? Shall such a recompense be bestowed, on those who never were at any pains about it? What toil and travail does it cost the avaricious, to gather together that white and yellow earth which they call money? With what care and pains, do the ambitious ascend to any degree of preferment? What industry and study do studious men employ, to reach a little knowledge, and be reckoned amongst the learned? And shall heaven and everlasting happiness slide into our arms, when we are asleep? No, certainly. God will never disparage

the glories of that place, to bestow them on those, who have not thought them worthy of their most serious endeavours. But, as the greatness of that happiness may justly discourage all pretenders to it, so its nature leaves small ground of hope, to the greater part of the world. I wonder, what most men expect to meet with in heaven, who dream of coming thither. Think they to feast and revel, and luxuriate there, and to spend eternity in foolish mirth and vain talk; in sport and drollery, and sensual pleasure?—for such alone are the exercises of which they are capable, or in which they can find relish or satisfaction. Away with all those Turkish notions, whereby we disparage the happiness to which we pretend. The joys of that place are pure and spiritual, and no unclean thing shall enter there. The felicity of blessed spirits consists in beholding and admiring the divine perfections, and finding the image of them shining in themselves, in perfect conformity to the will and nature of God, and intimate and delightful society and communion with Him. And shall souls be blessed, in seeing and partaking of the divine likeness, who never loved it, and who would chuse any thing, rather than to converse with God? A little reflection on the common temper of men's minds, may assure us, that they are very far from that meetness and aptitude “for the inheritance of the saints in light” * which the Apostle speaks

* Col. i. 12.

of. The notion and nature of blessedness must surely be changed ; or else, the temper of their spirits : either they must have new hearts, or a new heaven created for them, before they can be happy. It is a strange infatuation of self-love, that men in the gall of bitterness, should think it is well with their souls, and fancy themselves in a case good enough, for the enjoyment of divine pleasures.

In the fourth place, Let us reflect on the attempts and endeavours of those, who have gone to heaven before us. How they did fight and strive, wrestle and run, for obtaining that glorious prize ; and we shall see how improbable it is, that the greatest part of men should gain it, with so little pains. Noah, Abraham, Jacob, David, and all those ancient worthies, recorded in holy writ, have either done or suffered so great things, as gave ground to expect that country which they looked after, “ accounting themselves strangers and pilgrims on the earth ;” as you may see in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews : where, after a large catalogue of their performances, the author tells us of others, “ who were tortured, not accepting deliverance ; that they might obtain a better resurrection. And others had trial of cruel mockings, and scourgings, yea, moreover, of bonds and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword : they wandered about in sheep-skins, and goat-skins ; being destitute, afflicted, tormented : of whom the world was not

worthy. They wandered in deserts and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth." Such, also, was that holy violence, wherewith the Christians of the first and golden ages, forced open the gates of heaven, and took possession of it. The ardent affection with which these blessed souls were inflamed towards their Maker and Redeemer, made them willingly give up their bodies to be burned in the fire, for the glory of God, and the propagation of the Christian faith. Their constancy in sufferings, amazed their bloody persecutors, and outwearied the cruelty of their tormentors; they rejoiced in nothing more, "than that they were accounted worthy to suffer shame, for the name of Jesus." And what shall we say of their universal charity and love, which reached their very enemies? Of their humility and meekness, justice and temperance, and all those other virtues, which many of the heathen themselves observed and admired? 'Behold,' said one, 'how the Christians love one another!' 'These are the men,' says another, 'who speak as they think, and do as they speak.' Pliny, after an exact inquiry, writes to the Emperor Trajan, 'that he could never find any other guilt in the Christians, except they met together before day-break, to sing a hymn to Christ, as if he were God; and then to bind themselves with a sacrament or oath, not to do any mischief; but on the contrary, that they shall not rob, steal, or commit adultery, or falsify their words, or deny their trust, &c.' This was the crime of Christians, in

those first ages, to engage themselves not to commit any crime. They needed not, in those days, to be pursued by tedious processes, or dragged against their will to the profession of repentance. They would sue for it with tears, and stand, for many years, at the door of the church, begging to be received. The censures of the Church were then looked upon as very serious and dreadful things : and they who would encounter death, in the most terrible form, would tremble, if threatened with excommunication. Now, tell me, I pray you, what you think of these men? Did they supererogate, and go beyond their duty? Or were they fools in doing these things, when half the pains might have served their turn? Did heaven and happiness cost them so much labour, and think you to be carried thither fast asleep, or rather, while you are bending your forces quite another way? If you cannot look so far back, or if you imagine these but romances, like the poetic accounts of the golden age, when all men were happy and good, I shall then desire you to take notice of a few persons, whom the divine goodness has rescued from that deluge of wickedness, which overflows the world. There are, perhaps, some two or three in a city, or in a county, who live very far beyond the common rate of men, and who may be accounted angels upon earth, if compared with the multitude. They have escaped the pollution that is in the world, and have learned to despise all its vanities ; their affections are above, and their greatest business is,

to please and serve their Maker ; their thoughts and affections are, in a great measure, holy and pure, their converse innocent and useful, and in their whole deportment they observe such strict rules of holiness and virtue, as others may think needless or superstitious : and yet, these persons are deeply sensible of their own imperfections, and afraid enough to come short of heaven. I speak not now of those scrupulous persons, whom melancholy exposes to perpetual and unaccountable fears : much less of others, who make a trade of complaining ; and would be the better thought of, for speaking evil of themselves ; and would be very ill pleased, if you should believe them. I speak of rational and sober men, whose fears arise from their due consideration and measure of things ; from the right apprehensions which they have, of the holiness of God, and the meaning and import of the gospel-precepts. And, certainly, such holy jealousies over themselves ought not to be judged needless ; Saint Paul himself, who had been rapt up into the third heaven, and thereby received an earnest of eternal happiness, found it necessary to take care, “ lest, by any means, while he preached to others, himself should be a cast-away.”* I know it is ordinary for men, to laugh at those, who are more serious and conscientious than themselves ; to wonder what they aim at, and to hope to be as sure of heaven as they. But, ere long, they shal

* 1 Cor. xi. 27.

discover their mistake, and shall say, with those spoken of in the book of Wisdom : “ This was he, whom we had sometimes in derision, and a proverb of reproach. We fools accounted his life madness, and his end to be without honour. How is he numbered among the children of God, and his lot is among the saints ! Therefore, have we erred from the way of truth ; and the light of righteousness hath not shined unto us ; and the sun of righteousness rose not upon us.”

To come yet closer to our present purpose : a serious consideration of the laws and precepts of the gospel, will fully convince us of the straitness of the gate, and narrowness of the way, that leadeth to eternal life. We cannot name them all, nor insist upon any at length. Look through the excellent sermon on the mount, and see what our Saviour requires of his followers. You will find him enjoining such a profound humility, as shall make us think nothing of ourselves, and be content that others think nothing of us ; a meekness, which no injuries can overcome, no affronts nor indignities can exasperate ; a chastity, which restrains the sight of the eyes, and the wandering of the desires ; such an universal charity, as will make us tender other men’s welfare as our own, and never take any other revenge against our most bitter enemies, but to wish them well, and to do them all the good we can, whether they will or not. Whatever corrupt glosses men are bold to put on our Saviour’s words, the offering the other cheek to him who smote the right

one, and the giving our coat, to him who hath taken our cloak, obliges us to suffer injuries, and part with something of our right, in order to avoid strife and contention. The pulling out our right eye, and cutting off our right hand, that offends, imports the renouncing of the most gainful callings, or pleasant enjoyments, when they become a snare to us. The hating of father and mother for the sake of Christ, at least, implies the loving of Him, infinitely beyond our dearest relations; and the being ready to part with them, when either our duty, or His will calls for it. And we must not look upon these things, as only counsels of perfection; commendable in themselves, but which may yet be neglected without any great hazard. No, certainly; they are absolutely necessary: and it is folly to expect happiness, without the conscientious and sincere performance of them all: "Whosoever shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven;" that is, according to all interpreters, he shall have no interest in it. You see, then, by what strict rules he must square his actions, who can, with any ground, hope to be saved. But I must tell you further, that he must not be excited to the performance of his duty, merely by the force and sanctions of these laws. True religion is an inward, free, and self-moving principle: and those who have made a progress in it, are not actuated only by external motives; are not merely driven by threatenings, nor bribed by promises, nor

constrained by laws; but are powerfully inclined to that which is good. Though holy and religious persons much regard the law of God, yet it is not so much the authority and sanction of it, as its reasonableness, and purity, and goodness, that prevails with them. They account it excellent and desirable in itself. They feel that in keeping of it there is great reward; and that divine love by which they are actuated, makes them become a law unto themselves:

Quis legem det amantibus?

Major est amor lex ipse sibi.

In a word, what our blessed Saviour said of himself, is in some measure applicable to his followers, that it is their meat and drink, to do their Father's will. And, as the natural appetite is carried out towards food, though we should not reflect on its necessity, for the preservation of our lives; so are they carried, with a natural and unforced propension, towards that which is good and commendable.

Hitherto, we have been speaking of the qualifications, which are necessary for obtaining an entrance into heaven. It is high time, we were casting our eyes upon the world, to see how the tempers and actions of men agree with those qualifications. And first, if we look back upon the old world, we shall see how soon wickedness overspread the face of the earth, and all flesh had corrupted their way; and of all the multitudes that were then in the world,

only Noah and his family were found worthy to escape the general deluge ; nay even in it there was a cursed Cham, the father of a wicked generation. After that, the church of God was confined to a very narrow corner. And, while darkness covered the face of the earth, only Palestine was enlightened with the knowledge of God : “ He shewed his word unto Jacob, his statutes and his judgments unto Israel. But he dealt not so with every nation : as for his judgments, they have not known them.* They were given up to the lusts of their own hearts, and worshipped the works of their own hands.” Their devotions were performed unto devils, and their religious mysteries were full of the grossest impurities. I shall not now enter on the debate, whether ever any Heathen might possibly have been saved? We are more concerned to secure our own salvation, than to dispute about theirs : and yet I must say, that, amongst all the lives of celebrated Heathen, I could never meet with the character of a truly good man. And, though I love not to decry morality, yet that pride and self-conceit which mingled itself with their fairest actions, makes me look upon them as, indeed, ‘ splendida peccata,’ a more specious kind of sins. But, supposing something could be said for Socrates and Plato, and two or three others, what is that to those huge multitudes, who, without all peradventure, ran head-long into everlasting destruction? But

* Psalm cxlvii. 19, 20.

let us leave those times, and look upon the present condition of the world. It is a sad account of it that is given by Breerwood, in his ‘Inquiries,’ that, dividing the whole world into thirty parts, nineteen are Pagan, six are Mahometan, and only five remain for Christians of all persuasions. I shall not warrant the exactness of his reckoning: but, certainly, the number of Christians bears but a very small proportion to the rest of mankind. And of these again, how few are there orthodox in their religion? I dare not condemn all those who live in the Romish communion: but surely they labour under very great disadvantages; and, besides the common difficulties of Christianity, their errors and superstitions are no small hindrances to their progress.

But we may, perhaps, think ourselves little concerned in them. Let us, then, consider those who live in communion with ourselves; and see, what is to be thought of the generality. And first, we shall find a very great number, so grossly ignorant, that they know not the way that leads to life. And truly it is not so broad, that people should keep it by guess. And, however they imagine, that their ignorance will not only be excusable in itself, but afford a cloak to their other wickedness, — yet dreadful is that threatening of the Prophet Isaiah, “It is a people of no understanding: therefore He that made them, will not have mercy upon them; and He that formed them, will shew them no favour.” But, besides those many

thousands that perish for lack of knowledge, how great are the number of vicious and scandalous persons? Remove but our gluttons and drunkards, our thieves and deceivers, our oppressors and extortioners, our scolders and revilers, our fornicators and adulterers, and all that abominable crew, that are guilty of such heinous crimes, and how thin should our churches be? To what a small number should we quickly be reduced? A little corner would hold us all. And think you these I have been speaking of, are fit to enter into the kingdom of heaven? Perhaps you may account us rash, to condemn so many of our neighbours, but the Apostle has done it to our hands: "Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolators, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God."* You see, what a heavy sentence is pronounced: and O how many are included under it! I shall name one other vice, which I fear will drive in no small number, of those who are yet behind; and that is, the unaccountable sin of swearing; by which men commonly throw away their souls, without any temptation, pleasure, or advantage. How often do men baffle the sacred name of God, by calling him

* 1 Cor. vi. 9, 10.

to witness such trifles, as they might be ashamed to attest, before any grave or sober person? This they account an ornament of speech; and their words would never sound big enough without it. I cannot pause, to reckon up all the aggravations of this sin. It is, certainly, inconsistent with a religious temper: and this alone, if there were no more, would condemn the greater part of the Christian world. And what shall we say of all those other vices, which are so frequently practised, yea, and defended too, among us? For, alas! we are arrived at that height of impiety, that virtue and vice seem to have shifted places; evil and good, to have changed their names. It is counted a gallant thing, to despise all divine and human laws; and a childish scrupulosity, to forbear any thing that may gratify our passions. A strong faith, is accounted an argument of weak judgment; dependence upon providence, is judged want of foresight; and there is no wit, but in deceiving others: no man is reckoned generous, unless he be extremely ambitious; and it is want of courage, to forgive an injury. O Religion, whither art thou fled? In what corner of the world shall we find thee? Shall we search for thee, in the courts and palaces of great men? Pride and luxury have driven thee thence; and they are too much concerned in the business and pleasures of this world, to regard those of another. Shall we seek thee in the cottages of the poor? Envy and discontent lodge there; their outward want takes up all their thoughts, and

they have little regard for their souls. Shall we go into the city? Cheating and extortion, and intemperance, are almost all that we can meet with there. And if we retire into the country, we shall find as little innocence in it: "We may look for judgment, but behold oppression; for righteousness, but behold a cry."

After all that we have hitherto said, some may think themselves safe enough; being conscious of none of those vices, which we have named. But, alas! what is all this? They may still be far from the kingdom of heaven. Religion consists not of negatives; and the being free from gross and scandalous vices, is a poor plea for heaven. Look how thy soul is furnished with those divine graces, which ought to qualify thee for it. I shall name but one; and it is, the love of God; every body pretends to it: but how few are there in the world, that understand what it means; that feel its power and efficacy, on their own spirits! Love is that weight, by which a soul is carried towards the object which it loves, and rests in it as its proper centre.* Those who are acquainted with this noble passion, even in its wanderings and deviations from its proper object, when it is wholly fixed on some silly creature like ourselves, — these, I say, know what mighty effects it is wont to produce, on the souls where it prevails; how it makes them, almost forget their own interest, and consult that only of another; how careful they are, of every

* 'Amor est pondus animi.'

thing that may please or advantage the person loved, and afraid, in any action, to offend them; what delight they have in their conversation, and how hardly they endure to be absent from them. See, therefore, if thou findest any thing answerable to these effects, in the affection which thou pretendest unto God. Are His glory and honour, the dearest of all things unto thee; wouldst thou rather hear thyself and all thy friends reviled, than His holy name blasphemed? Is it thy greatest care and business to please Him, and art thou watchful against every sin? Is there nothing in the world so dear unto thee, but thou wouldst part with for his sake? Desirest thou that he should do his own will, rather than thine? Is nothing so delightful, as to converse with him? And does every thing seem burthensome, which detains thee long from him? If we would examine ourselves by these tests, I fear most of us would find our confidence built on a sandy foundation.

Perhaps you will tell me, that though things be not so well at present, — though you have not yet attained these endowments, which are necessary to fit you for heaven, nor indeed have begun to endeavour after them, — yet, hereafter, you hope all shall be well; you will repent and amend before you die. Consider, I beseech you, my brethren, what it is that you say. When think you that this promised reformation shall begin? Some two or three years after this, when you have pleased yourselves, and indulged your appetites a little more?

But what assurance have you to live so long? Are not your neighbours, who expected death as little as you, dropping down every day around you? And suppose you live, what greater probability is there of your reformation, at a future time, than now? Had you not, several years ago, the same thoughts and resolutions which yet have taken no effect? Will you not again have the same temptations and shares? Will your passions be more easily overcome, when strengthened by longer custom? Will it be more easy to return, after you have wandered further out of the way? Perhaps it is on a death-bed-repentance, that you have grounded your hopes; you resolve to part with your appetites, when you can keep them no longer, and to serve God Almighty, with the dregs of your time. (I shall not tell you, what shrewd objections are proposed, by some great and learned men, against the validity and acceptableness of such a repentance: some of them, perhaps, have been too peremptory and severe. True and unfeigned repentance, which includes the sincere love of God, and resignation to him, will never come too late: the foundation of heaven is laid in the souls of those that have it. But, when we consider, what a great matter true repentance is; the shortness of the time, the hindrances of a distempered body, and the ordinary relapses of men who have promised fair on such occasions, and have outlived that sickness, which they thought had been mortal; when we consider these things, we cannot but acknowledge, that a

death-bed repentance is seldom sincere; and that it is an unfit time, to begin to fight with principalities and powers, when, perhaps, we have not strength to turn ourselves on our beds; in a word, that of those, who thus delay and put off the momentous business, but very few shall be saved.

When we have said all that we can say, there are many, who will never be persuaded of the truth of that which we have been proving. They cannot think it consistent with the goodness and mercy of God, that the greatest part of mankind should be damned: they cannot imagine, that heaven should be such an empty and desolate place, and have so very few to inhabit it. But what folly and madness is this; for sinful men to set rules unto the Divine goodness, and to draw conclusions from it, so expressly contrary to what He has himself revealed! Is it not enough, that he has taught us the way to be happy, and given his own Son to the death, to make it possible; that he has waited so long, and invited us so earnestly, and so frequently told us our hazard? If all this cannot prevail; if we be obstinately resolved to continue wicked and miserable; if we despise his goodness, and turn all his grace unto wantonness; if we slight his threatenings, and will have none of his reproof; if we court damnation, and throw ourselves headlong into hell, — how can we expect, that he should interpose his omnipotency to pull us from thence, and place us in heaven against our will? Those blessed regions are not like our new

plantations, which are sometimes peopled with the worst sort of persons, lest they should be altogether desolate. There are thousands of angels, and ten thousand times ten thousand, that stand about the throne. We know little the extent of the universe; or what proportion the wicked or miserable part of rational beings, bears to those that are happy and good: but this we know, that God was infinitely happy, before he had made any creature; that he needs not the society of the holy angels, and will never admit that of wicked and irreligious men.

The doctrine on which we have been insisting, is sad and lamentable; but the consideration of it may be very useful. It must needs touch any serious person, with very much of grief and trouble, to behold a multitude of people convened together, and to think, that, before thirty or forty years, a little more, or a great deal less, they shall all go down unto the dark and silent grave, and the greater, the far greater part of their souls, shall perish everlastingly. But this consideration may urge us to the greater diligence and care, that we may do what we can, towards the prevention of these sad consequences. Were the sense of this truth deeply engraven on all our minds, with what care and diligence, with what seriousness and zeal, would ministers deal with the people committed to their charge, that, by any means, they might save some! How would parents, and husbands, and wives, employ all their diligence and industry, and make

use of the most likely methods, for reclaiming their near relations, and pulling them from the brink of hell? Lastly, what holy violence would each of us use, for saving ourselves from this common ruin, and making our calling and election sure? This is the use of what we have been endeavouring to enforce : and may Almighty God so accompany it with his blessing and power, that it may be happily effectual, to so excellent a purpose. And unto this God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, be all honour, praise, and thanksgiving, now, and for ever. Amen.

of his divine songs. How often do we find him exciting and disposing himself to join voice, hand, and heart, together in the holy and delightful employment. "Bless the Lord, O my soul : and all

SERMON V.

THE DUTY AND PLEASURE OF PRAISE AND
THANKSGIVING.

And, conscious of his own insufficiency for the work, he invites the co-operation of others : calling
 PSALM CVII. 15.

*Oh that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and
for his wonderful works to the children of men !*

THERE is scarcely any duty of religion more commonly neglected, or more slightly performed, than this of praise and thanksgiving. The sense of our wants urges us to beg favours from God ; and the consciousness of our sins constrains us to deprecate his wrath. Thus interest and self-love send us to our prayers. But, alas ! how small a part has an ingenuous gratitude, in our devotion ? How seldom are we serious and hearty, in our acknowledgment of the divine bounty ? The slender returns of this nature which we make, are often a formal ceremony, a preface to usher in our petitions for what we want, rather than any sincere expression of our thankfulness for what we have received. Far different was the temper of the holy Psalmist ; whose affectionate acknowledgments of the goodness and bounty of God, in the cheerful celebration of his praise, make up a considerable part

of his divine songs. How often do we find him exciting and disposing himself to join voice, hand, and heart, together, in this holy and delightful employment? “Bless the Lord, O my soul : and all that is within me, bless his holy name.* My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed. I will sing and give praise. Awake up, my glory, awake psaltery and harp : I myself will awake right early.”† And, conscious of his own insufficiency for the work, he invites the co-operation of others ; calling in the whole creation to assist him : “O sing unto the Lord a new song ; sing unto the Lord all the earth. Give unto the Lord, O ye kindreds of the people, give unto the Lord glory and strength.‡ Praise ye the Lord. Praise ye the Lord, from the heavens : praise him, in the heights. Praise him, ye sun and moon : praise him, all ye stars of light ; mountains, and all hills ; fruitful trees, and all cedars ; beasts, and all cattle ; creeping things, and flying fowl. § Bless the Lord, all his works, in all places of his dominion.” || Many such figurative expressions occur, and allowance must be made for the poetical strain : but, in the text, we have a proper and passionate wish, “Oh that men would praise the Lord for his goodness ; and for his wonderful works to the children of men !”

Man is the great priest of this lower world ; by whom all the homage and service of the other

* Psalm ciii. 1.

† Psalm lvii. 7, 8.

‡ Psalm xcvi. 1. 7.

§ Psalm cxlviii. 1. 3. 9, 10.

|| Psalm ciii. 22.

creatures, is to be paid to their common lord and maker. “God hath made him to have dominion over the works of his hand; he hath put all things under his feet: all sheep and oxen; yea, and the beasts of the field: the fowl of the air, the fish of the sea, and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the seas.”* The divine bounty, in maintaining these poor creatures, redounds to man; and therefore it is highly reasonable that he should pay the tribute of praise for them, who are not capable of knowing their dependence on God, or their obligations unto him. “The young lions roar, and seek their meat from God.”† “The young ravens do cry unto him.”‡ But these are only the complaints of languishing nature, heard and relieved by the God of nature; though not directly and particularly addressed to him. Man alone is capable to entertain communion with God; to know his goodness, and to celebrate his praise.

“Oh that men would praise the Lord!” Praise is the acknowledgment of the goodness and excellency of a person: and, though the desire of it in us, who have nothing of our own but folly and sin, and whose best performances have a miserable alloy of adherent infirmity, be a blameable vanity and presumption, — yet, certainly, it is highly reasonable for God, who is the author and fountain of all good, to require and expect praise from his creatures. He has made this great world, as a

* Psalm viii. 6, 7, 8. † Psalm civ. 21. ‡ Job xxxviii. 41.

temple for his honour : and it should continually resound with his praise. It is true, all the praises of men and angels can add nothing to his happiness and glory ; yet, there is a fitness and congruity in the thing ; and it is our happiness, as well as our duty, to perform it : “ for it is good to sing praises to our God ; for it is pleasant, and praise is comely.”* This is the blessed employment of the holy ones above : and, if ever we taste the pleasures of heaven upon earth, it is then, when our souls are transported with an overflowing sense of the divine goodness, and our mouths are filled with his praise.

“ Oh that men would praise the Lord, for his goodness !” All the attributes of God deserve our highest praise. Power, wisdom, and goodness are all one in him ; but, as we have different conceptions of these, goodness is that lovely attribute, which peculiarly attracts our affection, and excites our praise. Our love to God, does not so much flow from the consideration of his greatness, whereby he can do whatever he will, as from the consideration of his goodness, that he always wills what is best ; that his almighty power is regulated by infinite wisdom, and actuated and exerted by unspeakable bounty.

“ O that men would praise the Lord, for his goodness ; and for his wonderful works to the children of men !” The divine goodness spreads and extends

* Psalm cxlvii. 1.

itself, over all the parts of the universe; and embraces the whole creation in its arms: it not only displays itself most illustriously, to the blessed inhabitants above; but also reaches to the meanest worm, that crawls upon the ground. The beasts of the field, and the fowls of the air, and the fishes of the sea, and the innumerable swarms of little insects which we can hardly discern with our eyes, are all subjects of that almighty care: by him, they are brought forth into the world; by him, they are furnished with provision suitable for them: "These all wait upon thee; that thou mayest give them their meat in due season. That thou givest them, they gather; thou openest thine hand, they are filled with good."* But here, to excite us to thankfulness, he makes choice of an instance in which we ourselves are more nearly concerned; and exhorts us to praise the Lord for his wonderful works to the children of men. If the goodness of God to the holy angels, be above our reach; and his bounty to the inferior creatures, be below our notice, — yet, surely, we must be infinitely dull, if we do not observe his dealings with ourselves, and those of our kind. As our interest makes us more sensible of this peculiar bounty, so gratitude obliges us, to a more particular acknowledgment of it. Thus, you have the meaning and import of the text. I know not how we can better employ the rest of the time, than by suggesting to your medi-

* Psalm civ. 27, 28.

tations particular instances of this goodness, and of God's wonderful works to the children of men.

Let us, then, reflect on the works both of creation and providence. Let us consider, in what a goodly and well-furnished world he hath placed us, how "he hath stretched out the heavens as a curtain over our heads, and therein hath set a tabernacle for the sun;" which, as an universal lamp, enlightens all the inhabitants of the earth. "His going forth is from the end of the heaven, his circuit to the ends thereof; and there is nothing hid from his heat." In the morning he arises, and makes the darkness flee before him, and discovers all the beauty and lustre of things. And truly, "the light is sweet; and a pleasant thing it is, for the eyes to behold the sun." Nor is it less useful and advantageous, for directing our ways, and ordering our several employments: "Man goeth forth to his work, and to his labour, until the evening. He maketh darkness, and it is night."* The curtains are drawn, and all things hushed into silence, that man may enjoy the more quiet repose: and yet, to lessen the horror of darkness, and to guide such as are obliged to travel in the night, while the sun is enlightening another part of the world, we have the moon and stars to supply his room. "O give thanks unto the Lord, for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever. To him, that by wisdom made the heavens: for his mercy

* Psalm civ. 23.

endureth for ever. To Him, that made great lights : for his mercy endureth for ever. The sun to rule by day : for his mercy endureth for ever. The moon and stars to rule by night : for his mercy endureth for ever.”

Again, how wonderfully has he furnished this lower world for our maintenance and accommodation. “The heaven, even the heaven of heavens are the Lord’s : but the earth hath he given to the children of men.* He hath made us to have dominion over all the works of his hands ; he hath put all things under our feet : all sheep and oxen, yea, and the beasts of the field : the fowl of the air, the fish of the sea, and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the seas.”† By the art and industry of man, the swiftest fowls are caught ; the fiercest creatures are tamed ; the strongest beasts are overcome ; and all are made conducive to his service. The horse helps our journey, both with speed and ease ; the oxen labour the ground for us ; sheep afford us meat and clothes ; from the bowels of the earth we dig fuel, metals, and stones ; which are still the more plentiful, as they are useful and advantageous to us. Those stones which serve for building, are, almost every where, ready at hand ; while rubies and diamonds, and other such glittering trifles, are found but in a few places of the world, and obtained with a great deal of toil. And to what hardship should all sort of artificers be put, if iron were as scanty as gold ? The surface of the earth yields grass for the

* Psalm cxv. 16.

† Psalm viii. 6, 7, 8.

cattle, and herb for the service of man; and wine that maketh glad the heart of man, and bread which strengthens his heart. These it affords us, from time to time; and, while we are spending the productions of one year, God is providing for us against another. There is no small variety of seasons and influences, which concur for the production of that corn, which we murmur for so much when we want it, and value so little when it abounds. The winter cold, must temper and prepare the earth; the gentle spring, must cherish and foment the seed; vapours must be raised, and condensed into clouds, and squeezed out and sifted into little drops, to water and refresh the ground; and then, the summer heat must ripen and digest the corn, before it be fit to be cut down. “Thou visitest the earth and waterest it: thou greatly enrichest it with the river of God which is full of water: thou preparest them corn, when thou hast so provided for it. Thou waterest the ridges thereof abundantly: thou settlest the furrows thereof: thou makest it soft with showers; thou blessest the springing thereof: thou crownest the year with thy goodness; and all thy paths drop fatness. They drop upon the pastures of the wilderness; and the little hills rejoice on every side. The pastures are clothed with flocks; the valleys also are covered over with corn; they shout for joy, they also sing.”*

“O Lord, how wonderful are thy works! in wisdom hast thou made them all: the earth is full

* Psalm lxxv. 9, 10, 11, 12, 13.

of thy riches. So is the great and wide sea, wherein are things creeping innumerable, both small and great fishes. There go the ships," those great engines of traffic and commerce, by which every country is easily furnished with the productions of another. And, indeed, it is a wonderful and astonishing contrivance of nature, that men should be easily transported to the remotest places, in such floating houses, and carried, so to speak, upon the wings of the wind; that they should be able to find out their way, in the widest ocean and darkest night, by the direction of a trembling needle, and by the unaccountable influence of a sorry stone. "They that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters: these men see the works of the Lord, and his wonders in the deep. For he commandeth, and raiseth the stormy wind, which lifteth up the waves thereof. They mount up to the heaven, they go down again to the depths, their soul is melted because of trouble. They reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man, and are at their wits' end. Then they cry unto the Lord, in their trouble, and he bringeth them out of their distresses. He maketh the storm a calm, so that the waves thereof are still. Then are they glad, because they are quiet; so he bringeth them unto the desired haven. Oh that men would therefore praise the Lord for his goodness, and for all the wonders that he doeth for the children of men." *

* Psalm, ciii. 27. &c.

But now, we are fallen, unawares, from the works of creation, to those of Providence. Indeed, it is hard to keep to any exact method, in a subject so copious; where one thing obtrudes itself upon us, before we have done with another. Let us call back our thoughts, to a more orderly consideration of that bountiful providence, which follows us from time to time. We are infinitely indebted to the divine goodness, before we see the light of the world. “He poureth us out as milk, and curdleth us like cheese. He clothes us with skin and flesh, and fenceth us with bones and sinews. He granteth us life and favour, and his visitation preserveth our spirit.” * This is so entirely the work of God, that the parents do not so much as understand how it is performed; for, who knows the way of the spirit, how it comes to enlighten a piece of matter; or how the bones grow, in the womb of her that is with child? “I will praise thee, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvellous are thy works, and that my soul knoweth right well. My substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Thine eyes did see my substance yet being unperfect, and in thy book were all my members written; which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them. How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God! How great is the sum of them!” † Nine

* Job, x. 10, 11, 12.

† Psalm cxxxix. 14, 15, 16, 17.

months ordinarily pass in the forming of this curious and wonderful piece, before it be exposed to the view of the world; and then, the prisoner is released from that narrow confinement, and the mother and the child are delivered together. The mother forgetteth her anguish and pangs, for joy that a man child is born into the world. The poor infant is naked and weak, ready to expire for hunger and cold, unable to do any thing for itself but weep and cry: but he that brought it into the world, has already provided for its sustentation. The mother's breasts are filled with a wholesome and delicious liquor, which fails not, from time to time; but is invisibly supplied, like the widow of Sarepta's oil, till the child become capable of stronger food.

But it was not enough, that mothers should be enabled to sustain their infants, unless they had been also powerfully inclined to it; and, therefore, God hath implanted in them those bowels of kindness and compassion, which prompts them to the most tender and affectionate care, and makes them as ready to help their children's necessities as their own: which, though it hardly deserve the name of a virtue, being common to them with the brutes, for "even the sea-monsters draw out their breasts, and give suck to their young;"* yet, certainly, it is an effect of the divine wisdom, that infants may not want those succours, which would never have

* Lam. iv. 3.

been so effectually secured to them by a law. Meanwhile, the poor infant is so weak, and so unable to endure the least violence, and withal exposed to so innumerable dangers, that the mother's solicitude and care would be to little purpose, if it were not preserved by a higher and invisible power, which watches for its safety, and keeps it from being overlaid, when the mother and nurse are fast asleep.

As we grow in years, our necessities multiply, and dangers increase rather than diminish; and we are still more and more obliged to God, for the supply of the one, and for our preservation from the other. We think, perhaps, 'we have now set up for ourselves; and can provide what is necessary by our own industry; and can keep ourselves out of harm's way.' But there cannot be a more foolish and unreasonable thought. There needs but a little consideration to undeceive us. All that we project and do for ourselves, depends on the integrity of our faculties, and the soundness of our reason; a happiness, which we can never secure to ourselves. I chuse this instance the rather, because it is a mercy invaluable in itself, and I fear very seldom considered by us. What an unspeakable blessing it is, that we are preserved in our right wits; that we are not roaring in some bedlam, or running furiously up and down the streets; that we have not our spirits sunk into silliness or stupidity, which would make every little child mock and deride us! It is possible enough, that

this should befall the wisest and most stedfast of us all. A stroke on the head, a few more degrees of heat in the blood, a little more agitation of the vital spirits, were enough to do the business. So weak and mutable creatures are we; so small is the distance between a wise man and a fool. Next to the use of our reason, how much are we indebted to the divine goodness, for our health and welfare! These bodies of ours are made up of so various parts, and withal, so nice and delicate, that the least thing in the world is enough to entangle and disorder them. A drop of humour, or a grain of sand, will sometimes occasion such anguish and pain, as render a man insensible to all the comforts which he enjoys in the world: and they who understand any thing of the human body, will justly wonder that all the parts are kept in order for an hour.* What a mercy, therefore, ought we to account it,

* 'Death meets us every where, and is procured by every instrument, and in all chances, and enters in at many doors; by violence and secret influence, by the aspect of a star and the smell of a mist, by the emissions of a cloud, and the meeting of a vapour, by the fall of a chariot, and the stumbling at a stone, by a full meal or an empty stomach, by watching at the wine, or by watching at prayers; by the sun or the moon; by a heat or a cold; by sleepless nights, or sleeping days; by water frozen into the hardness and sharpness of a dagger; or water thawed into the floods of a river; by a hair or a raisin; by violent motion, or sitting still; by severity, or dissolution; by God's mercy, or God's anger; by every thing in providence and every thing in manners, by every thing in nature, and every thing in chance.'

Jeremy Taylor. Works, vol. iv. p. 341.

to find ourselves in health and vigour; no aching in our head, no noisomeness in our stomach, no fever in the blood, none of the humours vitiated, none of those innumerable conduits broken which convey them, but all the organs performing their proper functions, and a sprightly vigour possessing every part? How much are we indebted to that providence, which preserves us from falls and bruises, and keeps all our bones so that none of them is broken; which watches over us, when we are not able to care for ourselves? What a blessing it is, to enjoy the repose of the night; that we are not wearied with endless tossings and rollings, nor “scared with dreams, and terrified with visions,” visitations, of which holy Job complains; that we are protected, from fire and violence, from evil spirits, and from evil men: “I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep; for thou, Lord, only, makest me to dwell in safety!”

And what shall we say, of our food and raiment,

‘ Some from the stranded vessel force their way;
 Fearful of fate, they meet it in the sea:
 Some, who escape the fury of the wave,
 Sicken on earth, and sink into a grave.
 In journeys or at home, in war or peace,
 By hardships many, many fall by ease.
 Each changing season does its poison bring,
 Rheums chill the winter, agues blast the spring:
 Wet, dry, cold, hot, at the appointed hour,
 All act subservient to the tyrant’s power;
 And, when obedient Nature knows his will,
 A fly, a grape-stone, or a hair can kill.’ — *Prior*. ED. ;

of our houses and manifold accommodations, of the kindness of our neighbours, and the love of our friends, of all the means of our subsistence, and all the comforts of our lives? We are made up, as it were, of a great many several pieces, have such a variety of interests and enjoyments concurring to our present happiness, that it is an unspeakable goodness which continues them all with us, from time to time : that, when we awake in the morning, we shall find our minds clear, our bodies well, our house safe, all our friends in health, and all our interests secure. He is “a wall of fire about us, and about all that we have, by night and by day, and his mercies are new every morning.” It were tedious to speak of those more public mercies, the peace and tranquillity of kingdoms, and all the happy effects of society and government. I shall only say, that it is a signal instance of the divine wisdom and goodness in the government of the world, that such a vast number of persons, actuated only by self-love, should all conspire for the public interest, and so eminently advance one another’s welfare ; that magistrates should so willingly undergo the trouble of government ; and that a heady and inconsiderate multitude should be commanded and overawed by a single man. Certainly, it can be no other, but that same God, who stilleth the noise of the waves, that can prevent or compose, the tumults of the people.

Hitherto, we have considered those instances of the divine bounty, which relate to our temporal

concerns. But, surely, we were made for some higher and more excellent end, than to pass a few months or years in this world to eat, drink, sleep, and die. God has designed us for a more lasting and durable life; and has, accordingly, made greater provisions for it. He takes care of our very bodies; but has an infinitely greater regard to those spiritual and immortal substances which he has breathed into us. And here, in all reason, we ought to begin with that great and fundamental mercy, which is the root and spring of all his other mercies towards the souls of men; I mean, the incarnation and the death of his only begotten Son. But alas! where are those affections, with which that mercy should be spoken and heard of? Our dulness makes me almost afraid to meddle with so high a theme. That the eternal Son of God, the Wisdom of the Father, the Maker and Lord of all things, should clothe himself with the infirmities of the human nature, and come down from the habitation of his glory, and take up his abode among the wretched and rebellious children of men, to reclaim them from their wickedness and folly, and reduce them to their duty and their happiness, — that he should have gone up and down in the world, for upwards of thirty years, in poverty, affliction, and contempt; doing good and suffering evil, scattering blessings and enduring injuries, wherever he came; and, at last, should have yielded up his life, in unspeakable anguish and torment, to be a propitiation for our sins, — these are matters which

should never be spoken or heard of, without our losing ourselves, as it were, in a rapture of admiration, gratitude, and love : “ O the breadth, length, depth, and height, of that love, which passeth all knowledge ;” which made God assume our nature, that we might become partakers of His ! It is true, all that our Saviour has done and suffered, proves ineffectual to the greater part of mankind. But surely they have themselves to blame. God hath both said and sworn, “ that he hath no pleasure in the death of sinners, but would have them rather repent and live.” And, indeed, his way of dealing with them, sufficiently declares the same truth. With what long-suffering patience, does he wait for their repentance ; what pains does he take, to reclaim, and to restore them !

It is an astonishing thing, to consider, what indignities and affronts are, every day, done unto that infinite Majesty, by sinful dust and ashes, and that he does not avenge himself by their total overthrow ; that they should violate his law, and despise his threatenings, and defy him, as it were, to his very face, and yet that he should pity and spare them, and wait to be gracious unto them. Were the government of the world committed to the meekest person on the face of the earth, he would never endure the outrages which are committed against heaven ; he would presently lose all his patience, and turn the whole frame into ruin. But God is love. “ His thoughts and ways are not like those of men ; but, as the heavens are

higher than the earth, so are his thoughts and ways higher than ours." And, when the obstinate wickedness of sinful creatures forces, as it were, and extorts punishment from his hands, what reluctance, what unwillingness does he express to this work; this strange and unnatural work, as himself seems to term it? "How shall I give thee up, O Ephraim? How shall I give thee up? O that my people had hearkened unto me, that Israel had known my ways! O Jerusalem! Jerusalem! thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not. Behold, your house is left unto you desolate!"

Again, as God waits patiently for our reformation, so he makes use of many methods and means, to bring us unto it. He has published the Gospel through the world, and brought down the knowledge of it to our days, in spite of all the opposition of devils and men. He has established a church, and appointed a whole order of men, whose peculiar calling and business in the world, is, to take care of people's souls, to instruct them in the way to heaven, and, as ambassadors in Christ's stead, to beseech them to be reconciled unto God. These are some of his common mercies: but who can express that favour and love, which he shows to his own; to those blessed persons, whom he chuses, and causes to approach unto himself, when

he rescues them from the vanity of their conversation, and from “that pollution which is in the world, through lust;” when he moulds their souls into a conformity with himself, and stamps his blessed image upon them; when he visits them with his Holy Spirit, and fills their heart with those hidden pleasures, which none can understand but those that feel them: “A stranger intermeddleth not with their joy.” And yet even these, are but the earnest, of that great felicity for which he has designed us, of “those joys that are at his right hand, those pleasures which endure for evermore.” “Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor can it enter into the heart of man to conceive, what God hath prepared for those that love him.” And “it doth not yet appear, what we shall be.” Meanwhile, those small and imperfect discoveries which are made to us in the holy Scriptures, of that inconceivable happiness, are enough to overwhelm us with admiration and wonder. To think, that the blessed day is coming, when we shall be loosed from these dull and lumpish bodies; those sinks of corruption, diseases, and pains; those prisons and dungeons of our heaven-born souls; and, being clothed with robes of light and glory, shall get above the clouds, and all those storms and tempests which are here below; and be carried into those blessed regions of calmness and serenity, of peace and joy, of happiness and security; when we shall come unto the “innumerable company of angels, and the general assembly of the church of the first-born, and the

spirits of just men made perfect ; and to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant ;” there to behold the glory of God, and all the splendour of the court of heaven : to view and contemplate that infinite power which created the world, that unsearchable wisdom which orders all things, that unspeakable goodness which employs them both ; nay, “ so to see God, as to become like unto him ;” * and “ beholding, with open face, the glory of the Lord, to be changed into the same image, from glory to glory ;” † to receive the continual illapses of the divine goodness, and the constant expressions of his favour and love ; to have our own souls melted and dissolved, into the flames of reciprocal affection, and that fire fed and nourished, by uninterrupted enjoyments ; in a word, to be continually transported into ecstasies and raptures, and swallowed up in the embraces of eternal sweetness, and to be lost, as it were, in the source and fountain of happiness and bliss ! “ Lord, what is man, that thou takest knowledge of him ? or the son of man, that thou makest such account of him ? ‡ and that thou shouldst set thine heart so much upon him ? § Oh that men would therefore praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men ! O give thanks unto the Lord, for he is good : for his mercy endureth for ever. Blessed be the name of the Lord from this time forth and for evermore.” *Amen.*

* 1 John, iii. 2.

† 2 Cor. iii. 18.

‡ Psalm cxliv. 3.

§ Job, vii. 17.

SERMON VI.

THE IMPORTANCE AND DIFFICULTY OF THE MINISTERIAL FUNCTION.

PREACHED BEFORE THE SYNOD OF ABERDEEN.

2 COR. II. 16.

Who is sufficient for these things ?

REVEREND and dearly beloved men, brethren, and fathers. It is one of the advantages of that peace and tranquillity, with which Almighty God is pleased to bless the poor church, that its officers have liberty of assembling together on these occasions, for mutual assistance and counsel, in the exercise of their holy function. And, indeed, if there were no matter of public deliberation, yet, ought we gladly to embrace the opportunity of seeing one another's faces; not only, that we may maintain and express a brotherly correspondence and affection, but also, that we may animate and excite one another to greater measures of diligence and zeal; as coals, being gathered together, mutually receive and propagate some new degrees of vigour and heat. This, I have always looked upon, as none of the meanest advantages of these synodical meetings; and shall think myself very happy, if my

poor endeavours, in the performance of this present duty, may, by the divine blessing, contribute any thing towards this excellent and desirable purpose. To this end, I have made choice of a text, which I hope, may afford us some useful meditations, for awakening in our souls a deeper sense, of those great engagements under which we lie.

The blessed Apostle, in the former verse, and in the beginning of this, had been speaking of the different success the Gospel met with, among those to whom it was preached; that it was not like those weak and harmless medicines, which, if they do no good, are sure to do no hurt; but, like some perfumes, which are comfortable and strengthening to the wholesome, but troublesome and noxious to the weak,—so does it prove a vital savour to those who receive and obey it, but a most deadly poison to all who reject and despise it: “For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish; to the one, we are a savour of death, unto death; and to the other, a savour of life, unto life.” And then, he takes occasion to consider, what a great matter it is to be employed in those administrations, which so nearly concern the happiness and misery of mankind: “and who is sufficient for these things?”

We shall not detain you, with an explication of the words. Two things, I conceive, are implied in them: 1. The importance, 2. The difficulty, of the Ministerial Function. For, if a business be of small concern, it is little matter who have the

management of it ; there is no great harm done if it miscarry ; any body is sufficient for that thing. On the other hand, let the matter be never so weighty, if there be no difficulty in it, no extraordinary endowments are necessary, in those to whom it is committed ; common prudence, and little care will suffice ; there is no likelihood that it can miscarry. But the work of the ministry is at once so important and so difficult, of so great consequence, and so hard to be performed, that there is a great deal of reason for an emphatic interrogation : “ Who is sufficient for these things ? ”

I. *First*, Let us fix our thoughts awhile, on the weight and importance of the ministry ; and we shall find, that it is a greater burthen lying on our shoulders, than if the greatest affairs of this world were devolved upon us, and we held up the pillars of the earth. This will appear, whether we consider the relation in which we stand to the Almighty God, or the charge of the flocks which are committed to our care.

To begin with the first. That infinite Majesty which created, and which continually upholds, the earth, and all things in it, as the just Owner and Lord of the whole creation, (for all are his servants, and must obey his will,) is yet pleased to claim a special property in some things, which he chuses for himself, and employs for peculiar designs : “ Nevertheless of old did he chuse a house for himself, and a place to be called by his name. At Salem was his tabernacle, and his dwelling-place in

Zion. The Lord loved the gates of Zion, more than all the dwellings of Jacob." And the church, in all ages, has thought it fit, to separate some places from vulgar and common use, and to appropriate them to the service of God. Again, though all times and seasons belong unto God, yet has he set apart a day for his worship, and sanctified a sabbath for himself.* All men were created for the honour of God, and are infinitely obliged to serve him; yet, because the greater part of mankind are too much engaged in worldly affairs, and have their souls fettered in the distracting cares of this life, and almost buried in their bodies, it has pleased the divine wisdom to call forth a select number of men, who, being delivered from those intanglements, and having their minds more highly purified, and more peculiarly fitted for the offices of religion, may attend continually on that very thing. Religion is every man's general calling; but it is our particular calling also: and, while the labourer is at his plough, the craftsman at his forge, and the merchant in his shop, the minister ought to be employed in the exercise of devotion, for the purpose of advancing piety, and the honour of our Maker. My beloved, you are deputed, as it were, by the whole creation, at least by the inferior world, to present their homage and service to God, and to praise him for all his works. You ought to maintain a correspondence between heaven and

* See Joseph Mede's masterly sermon on 1 Cor. xi. 22., and Dr. Townson's discourse on 'The sabbath and sanctuary.'—ED.

earth, to deprecate the wrath of God, and to avert his vengeance and plagues from mankind. Your business is the same with that of the holy angels: you dwell in the house of God, and should be continually praising him. And this is an employment so holy, that, were our souls as pure as cherubs, as zealous and active as the blessed spirits above, we should yet have reason to cover our faces, and to be swallowed up, in a deep sense of our own insufficiency. And what is sinful dust and ashes, that he should stand in so near a relation to the Lord of glory? What is man, O blessed God! that thou shouldst chuse him, and cause him to approach unto thee? “that he should dwell in thy courts; and be satisfied with the goodness of thy house, even of thy holy temple?”* The priesthood, under the law, was a very sacred and venerable thing; and no profane hand might intermeddle with the meanest offices that belonged unto it. All the zeal, and seemingly religious care, which Uzzah had for the tottering ark, served not to excuse his presumption, when he intruded upon the Levitical function: but, as the gospel-ministry is so much more excellent and sublime, being entrusted with the administration of those holy mysteries, which were but shadowed in the former, — how pure and holy ought those lips to be, by which God speaks unto his people, and by which they speak unto him; which sometimes pronounce

* Psalm lxxv. 4.

those powerful and effectual sentences of absolution and excommunication, which are so surely ratified in heaven : and those hands, which are employed in the laver of regeneration, and to handle the bread of life ! ‘ These are the men who assist at the pangs of the new birth, and to whom baptismal regeneration is committed : by those who put on Christ, and are buried with the Son of God, and so become members of that blessed head. Upon which account, the sacerdotal function is more creditable than that of kings and princes ; and we owe more honour unto priests, than unto parents themselves ; for they have begotten us of blood, and of the will of the flesh ; but these are the authors of that nativity, which we have from God ; that adoption, whereby, through grace, we become the children of the Most High.’ * And, again, the same Father, speaking of the sacerdotal power, expresses it in these terms : ‘ Men who live on earth, dispense the things that are in heaven ; and are entrusted with a power, to which neither angels nor archangels can pretend : for to none of these was it said, “ What ye bind on earth, shall be bound in heaven.” Earthly princes have the power of binding, but it is only the bodies of men. These bands that I speak of, take hold of their souls, and reach unto the very heavens ; so that God ratifies above, what the priest determines below ; and the decrees of his servants are confirmed by

* S. Chrysostom. de Sacerdotio, lib. iii.

their Lord. “The Father hath given all judgment to the Son ;” but now, it seems, the Son delivers it to the pastors of the church ; and so eminent is this authority, that, one would think, the persons invested with it, must needs be raised above the common condition of men, and exempted from human affections, and, as it were, already placed in heaven.’ Thus far this holy Father. Nor can I pass by what he says of that ineffable privilege, of the celebration of the holy sacrament, though some of his expressions, being figurative and hyperbolical, have been abused by the Romish party : ‘ When thou dost behold the Lord of glory offered up, and the priest performing the sacrifice, and the people round about dyed, as it were, and made red, with that precious blood ; where, I pray thee, dost thou conceive thyself to be ? Dost thou think thou art on earth, and conversing among mortal creatures ; or art thou not, rather, on a sudden, transported into heaven ? Dost thou not lose all thoughts of the body, and material things, and, with a pure mind, and naked soul, behold the things that are done in those regions above ? And, when the minister has invoked the divine Spirit, and performed those reverend and dreadful mysteries, and holds the Lord of all things in his hand, tell me, I beseech you, in what order of things we are to place him ? What uprightness, what purity is required of him ! What hands should they be, that administer those things ! What lips, that utter and pronounce those words ! For, at that time,

the holy angels stand by the priest ; the place is full of blessed spirits, who desire to look into those things ; and all the orders of the heavenly host shout, and raise their voice together, as we may easily believe, if we consider the work that is then in hand.' I cannot relate all that this excellent person speaks to the same purpose, but shall proceed to the next thing we proposed. Namely,

The weight and importance of the ministerial function, considered in relation to the people committed to our charge. We are not entrusted with their fortune or estate, nor with their bodily health and welfare, nor with the affairs of state, or the interest of kingdoms ; though, indeed, religion has no small influence on these ; and the labours of ministers, if successful, would contribute exceedingly to the public tranquillity, and the present felicity of men. But our main business lies another way. We have to do with rational and immortal souls, those most noble and divine substances, which proceeded from God, and, are capable of being united to him eternally, but, withal, in hazard of being eternally separated from him, — 'these stakes,' as the poetical and philosophic father calls them, 'between God and the devil ;'* and on us, it, in some measure, depends, to whose share they shall fall ; whether they shall be angels, or fiends. We may say, with reason, of our office, what the painter vainly boasted of, 'we work for eternity.'† The impresses we make, shall last for

* Αμφισβητήματα του Θεου και δαιμονων. — *Synesius*.

† 'Laboramus æternitati.'

ever. My beloved, the most serious of our thoughts come very far short of the inestimable worth of the ‘depositum,’ that treasure which is committed to our care. He who created and redeemed the souls of men, best understands their value : and we see in what esteem he holds them, by the pains which he is pleased to take about them. Their salvation was contrived, before the mountains were brought forth, before the foundation of the earth was laid ; the design was formed from all eternity ; and glorious are the methods by which it is accomplished. ‘ At this, both the law and the prophets aimed. To this purpose, the Deity emptied itself, and was clothed with the human nature ; to this purpose, was that strange and wonderful conjunction, God and man united together ! ’* At this end, all the actions, and all the sufferings, of our blessed Saviour aimed ; for this, he was born, and for this, he died. And shall we undervalue the price of his blood, or think it a small matter, to have the charge of those for whom it was shed ? It is the Church of God, which we must oversee and feed ; that Church, for which the world is upheld, which is sanctified by the Holy Ghost, on which the angels themselves attend. What a weighty charge is this we have undertaken ! “ Who is sufficient for these things ? ”

That these matters may yet make a deeper impression on our hearts, let us farther consider, the dreadful consequences of miscarriage in the dis-

* ‘ Huc magistra lex tendit ; huc, inter Christum et legem, interjecti prophetæ ; huc exinanita Deitas ; huc assumpta caro ; huc nova illa mixtio. ’ — *S. Gregor. Naz.*

charge of the ministerial function; and we shall find, that it reflects a great deal of dishonour on the divine Majesty, and on our blessed Saviour; that it very much hazards the souls of our people, and certainly ruins our own. I say, it reflects dishonour on Almighty God; as the faults of servants commonly prejudice the reputation of their masters, and as the failings of ambassadors are imputed to their princes. We stand in a nearer relation to God, and are supposed to be best acquainted with his will, and to carry the deepest impressions of his nature on our minds. And ignorant people will entertain the meaner thoughts of the holiness of God, when they miss it in those who are called his servants. Certainly, it is no small reproach which the faults or miscarriages of ministers bring upon the ways of godliness, and upon the holy religion which we profess. It is no small affront, that is, hereby, offered to the blessed Author of Christianity; greater, without question, than all the malice and spite of his open enemies is able to practise: for, by the negligence of ministers, he is crucified afresh, and put to open shame. And how great is the hazard which our poor people run, by our negligence or failings? Even as much, as the worth of their souls amounts to. If the watchmen be not faithful, and give not timely warning, the sword will speedily come, and the people will be taken away in their sins.* ‘Like people, like priests,’ will still be a proverb of general truth: but,

* ‘Causa sunt ruinæ populi sacerdotes mali.’

if the negligence and miscarriage of a minister hazards the souls of others, it certainly ruins his own; which made St. Chrysostom say, ‘*Equidem, ex ecclesiæ ministris, non arbitror multos servari :*’ words so terrible, that I tremble to put them into English : and yet, if a man should speak fire, blood, and smoke ; if flames could come out of his mouth, instead of words ; if he had a voice like thunder, and an eye like lightning, he could not sufficiently represent the dreadful account that an unfaithful pastor shall make. Into what horror and confusion shall it cast them, at the last day, to hear the blood of the Son of God plead against them ; to hear our great Master say, ‘It was the purchase of my blood which ye did neglect. God died for these souls, of whom ye took so little pains ! Think not, therefore, to be saved by that blood, which ye have despised, or to escape the torments into which, multitudes are plunged, through your faults !’ By this time, I hope it is apparent, that the work of the ministry is of great weight and importance ; that much depends on the right discharge of this holy office ; and, that a miscarriage in it, is the most dangerous thing in the world.

II. The *second* thing of which we had to speak, is, the difficulty of managing this charge aright. And this will appear, if we consider, 1. The end and design of the ministerial function : 2. The impediments which we have to overcome, in the prosecution of that end : and, 3. The several sorts of duties and exercises, incumbent upon us.

1. As for the first: the great business of our calling is, to advance the divine life in the world; to make religion sway and prevail; to frame and mould the souls of men into a conformity to God, and superinduce the lineaments of his blessed image upon them; to enlighten their understandings, inform their judgments, rectify their wills, order their passions, and sanctify all their affections. The world lieth in sin; and it is our office to awaken men out of their deadly sleep; to rescue them out of that dismal condition. We are the instruments of God, for effectuating these great designs: and, though, when we have done what lies in our power, we be not accountable for the success, yet nothing below complete success should be our aim: and we should never cease our endeavours, until that gracious change be wrought in every person committed to our charge. Now, if any think this an easy work, let them pitch on some person of their acquaintance, whom they know to be addicted to some one particular vice, and try whether it be easy to reclaim him. Persuade the drunkard, if you can, to forsake his cups; the covetous wretch, to part with his money; reason but the wild gallant into serious thoughts, and a grave and sober deportment; try to purge your neighbourhood of gross crimes, and scandalous vices; and persuade those that live about you, to live at least as becomes men. In this undertaking, you have the advantage of dealing with that self-love, which prevails in them. You may easily convince them, that the practice of these virtues

which you recommend, would contribute much to their temporal felicity, to those interests of pleasure, advantage, and honour, for which they have the greatest regard; and yet, you shall find even this task, not easy to be performed. But, to raise men to the greatest heights of mortification and self-denial; to make them truly humble, meek, and resigned to the will of God; to overpower that selfish principle, which is so deeply rooted in the constitution of our souls, and which so readily insinuates itself into all our affections and designs; so to place divine love and universal charity upon the throne, that the honour of God, and the welfare of their fellow creatures, may be as dear to men, as their own concerns; to have religion become another nature unto them, and they, as it were, a living law unto themselves:—this, this is so great and wonderful a change, that, as Omnipotence only is able to produce it, so, certainly, they have a mighty task, who are employed as instruments in its production.

Again; let me appeal to the conscience and experience of every one, what difficulty they find, in dealing with their own souls, in regulating their own passions, and in mortifying their own corrupt affections: yet here, we have the advantage of a nearer application; we can carry home our reasons, with more force upon ourselves, than upon others; our thoughts and meditations must be more clear and lively, than our words and expressions are. If it be hard, then, to persuade ourselves to be good, it is, surely, much harder to persuade others to be so.

2. Consider, in the next place, the enemies whom we must encounter; enemies, that oppose the design of our employments. "We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers." All the forces of hell are up in arms against us; all the powers of darkness continually oppose us; and little do we know those hidden arts, by which these accursed spirits apply themselves to the souls of men, to suggest and insinuate their temptations. The world, also, with all its cares and pleasures, is daily fighting against us; and there is no estate or condition in it, which is not surrounded with a thousand temptations. The poor, are so much taken up in providing for the necessities of this life, that they can hardly be persuaded to think upon another. The rich, are commonly drowned in sensual pleasures; and our Saviour tells us, "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven." The influence of sensual objects is very strong. And, though the possessions of the other world be as far beyond our enjoyments here, as this world is above nothing; yet, because the things of this world are present, and are ever and anon offering themselves unto us, and bearing upon our senses, therefore they too frequently prevail, against all the persuasions of reason, and religion too. And what shall we say of the evil company and bad example, that inveigle the souls of men? We, perhaps, see them once a week, and bring them to some degree of sobriety, and a

sound mind ; but then, their wicked neighbours, and the companions of their sin, meet them every day, and, by their counsel and example, obliterate any good impression which has been made upon them : and thus, we lose more in a week, than we are able to recover in a whole year. But the greatest enemies we have, are those within the souls of men ; their depraved affections, their inordinate desires, and their corrupt inclinations. When physicians undertake the cure of bodily distempers, they have the consent of the party ; he is ready to comply with their prescriptions. But our greatest difficulty, is in dealing with the wills of men, and making them consent to be cured. They hug the disease, and shun the medicine as poison, and have no desire to be well. Hence it is, that they do their utmost, to keep us strangers to their souls ; and take as much pains, to conceal their inward distempers, as they ought to do in revealing them. We have justly shaken off the tyranny of the Romish confession : but, alas ! our people go too far in the other extreme ; and, because they are not obliged to tell every thing to their pastors, in effect, they acquaint them with nothing. Perhaps some persons, lying under some terrors and trouble of mind, may apply themselves to us, to give vent to the fire that burns within them ; but otherwise, they content themselves to see us in the pulpit, and care not how little we be acquainted with their temper and conduct. It will be long, ere any come to tell us, that they find themselves proud, or passionate, or

revengeful, and inquire how they shall get these vices subdued ; that they are covetous and uncharitable, and beseech us to tell them how they shall amend ; to acquaint us with their temptations, and to learn the fittest methods to oppose them. We are seldom troubled with addresses of this nature ; and it is hard to do any thing towards a cure, when they will not let us know the disease.

3. The difficulty of the ministerial function will further appear, if we will consider its several duties and exercises. We shall but touch some of them, at present, and may, perhaps, have occasion to speak more in the application.

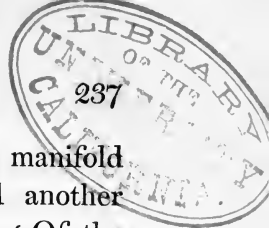
Catechizing is a necessary but painful office. It is no small toil, to tell the same things, a thousand times, to dull and ignorant people, who, perhaps, shall know but little when we have done. It is this laborious exercise, that sometimes tempts a minister to envy the condition of those who gain their living by the sweat of their brows, without the toil and distraction of their spirits.

Preaching is an exercise of which many are ambitious ; none more, than those who are least qualified. And, it is probable, that the desire of this liberty is no small temptation to some of our giddy people, to go over to that sect and party, where all ranks, and both sexes, are allowed the satisfaction to hear themselves talk in public. But it is not so easy a matter, to perform this task aright ; to stand in the presence of God, and to speak to His people, in His name, with that plainness and simplicity, that

seriousness and gravity, that zeal and concern, which the business requires; to accommodate ourselves to the capacity of the common people, without disgusting our more knowing hearers by the insipid flatness of our discourse; to excite and awaken drowsy souls, without terrifying and disturbing more tender consciences: to bear home the convictions of sin, without the appearance of any personal reflection; in a word, to approve ourselves unto God, as “workmen that need not be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.” *

Discipline is an edged tool; and they had needs be no fools that meddle with it. It is a hard thing, to manage the processes of the censures of the church, with such care and prudence, that we may neither encourage flagitious persons, by our remissness; nor irritate others, by needless severity; nor give advantage to captious and troublesome men, for want of some legal formality.

But, certainly, the greatest and most difficult work of a minister is, to apply himself particularly, to the several persons under his charge; to acquaint himself with their behaviour, and the temper of their souls; to redress what is amiss, and to prevent their future miscarriages. Without this private work, his other endeavours will do little good. And, considering the great variety that is among the humours and dispositions of men, equal, almost, to that of their faces, this must needs be an infinite labour. ‘It is the art of arts, and the most



difficult of all sciences, to govern such a manifold and various creature as man.* And another Gregory has written a whole tractate, 'Of the diversity there is amongst men's tempers, and the several ways of dealing with them.' What a martyrdom is it, for some modest and bashful tempers, when they find themselves obliged to use freedom and severity, in reproving the faults of those who, in quality or age, are above themselves! And, what a hard matter it is, to deal with people that are ready to leave the world, and enter upon eternity; when their souls, as it were, hang on their lips, and they have one foot, as we use to say, already in the grave! The minister is seldom sent for, till the physician has given the patient over: and then, they beg of him to dress their souls for heaven, when their winding-sheet is preparing, and their friends are almost ready to dress the body for the funeral. Now, though some of these have lived well, and, like the wise virgins, have oil in their lamps; yet, it is a great matter to calm them, and to dispose their souls for that great change, which they are presently to undergo. But, alas! it fares otherwise with the greater part. They are yet strangers to the ways of religion; the work of their salvation is yet to begin; their passions to be mortified, their corruptions subdued, the whole frame of their souls to be changed: and, though they have scarce so much strength as to turn them on their beds, yet their warfare against

* Gregor. Naz. Orat. Apologet.

principalities, powers, and spiritual wickedness, is but newly commenced ; their work is great, their disadvantages many, and the time very short that is before them. Perhaps they are dull and insensible, and we shall hardly persuade them of their danger. They will acknowledge ‘ they are sinners, and so are all others, as well as they ; they trust to the mercies of Christ, and have confidence enough of their salvation ; and cannot be persuaded they want any thing, that is necessary for its security.’ Others, again, are seized with fear, and call for the minister to comfort them. What shall he do ? Shall he tell them, that all their terrors are just, and it is now too late to repent ? I know some divines are peremptory in this case, and think they should be left in despair ; but, surely, it were a sad employment for a minister, to visit a dying man, only in order to tell him that he is damned ; and, withal, it is too great boldness in us, to limit the grace and mercy of God. True and sincere repentance will never come too late ; but, certainly, a death-bed repentance is seldom sincere ; and it is hard, either for the minister, or for the man himself, to tell, whether it be only the fear of hell, or a true and godly sorrow, that he feels within his soul. All that a minister can do, is, to press him to all possible seriousness, and to resign himself to God for the event ; or to lay before him, in general, the terms and conditions of the gospel-covenant : the application will be hard and uncertain.

These, and many more, are the difficulties of the ministerial function. It was not without a great deal of reason, that one of the Fathers called it, ‘A weight under which the shoulders of an angel might shrink.’* Hence it was, that the holy men of old have been so mightily afraid to undertake it. Jeremiah, who was sanctified from the womb, and ordained a prophet to the nations, when he received his commission, cried out, “Ah! Lord God, behold, I cannot speak, for I am a child.” Ezekiel, though strengthened and confirmed by God, yet went unwillingly; yea, “in the bitterness and indignation of his spirit.” And, in the ancient church, the more eminent and remarkable persons were, in piety and worth, the more sensible they were of the greatness of this charge, and the more unwilling to engage in it. Some of them, have fled into the mountains and deserts, or hid themselves in the dens and caverns of the earth; and were more afraid to be laid hands on by the bishop, than by the most bloody persecutors. Three times did Saint Ambrose flee from Milan; and it is reported, that, after he had travelled hard all night, he found himself, next morning, at the outer gate of that City, which he endeavoured to avoid. Saint Gregory Nazianzen, being taken in his flight, and ordained by force, composed that excellent oration, which is at the beginning of his works; in which he so well expresses the greatness and the danger of the ministry, that the reading of it, and I wish it

* ‘Onus angelicis humeris formidandum.’

were frequently and attentively read, might, I think, do much, to quell the confidence of the most confident intruders. Saint Augustine entered, by chance, into the church of Hippo, just as the bishop Valerius was speaking to the people, concerning the choice of a minister, of whom they stood in great need. He was presently pitched upon, and ordained almost by force, after he had, with tears, deprecated the charge: and, in these remarkable terms: ‘What, do you wish that I should perish?’* intimating the hazard he should thereby run. And Saint Chrysostom professes of himself, that, when he was chosen to a bishopric, his soul and body were almost parted asunder, so great was the grief and fear that seized upon his spirits; and that he many times wondered, how he had ever entered into the minds of those who chose him, or of what great offence that church had been guilty, which had provoked God to suffer it to be committed to such an unworthy person. So sensible were these excellent men of the difficulties of this holy function, even in those first and golden ages of the church. And, certainly, they are much augmented to us, who live in these dregs of time, when religion is almost banished out of the world; its principles called in question, by many pretenders to judgment and wit; and its practice not only neglected, but derided: insomuch, that men are frightened from godliness, by the contempt that lies upon it.† We have

* ‘Quid ! vultis ut peream?’

† ‘Mali esse coguntur, ne ridiculi fiant.’

a world of wickedness to fight against ; and “ Who is sufficient for these things ? ”

Thus, having prosecuted the import of the text, it is time to make some application of it. And, first, I shall address myself to those of the laity who vouchsafe us their presence ; that they may not think their time mis-spent, in some hours of attendance.

You see, what a weighty and difficult charge they have, to whom your souls are committed. Whence is it, then, that some of you account the ministerial function the most useless employment in the commonwealth, and that which might be most easily spared ? And think, that ministers have easy lives, gaining their living by the breath of their mouths, as some of you are pleased to word it ? Whence is it, that this holy calling comes to be so much despised, and that the names of Minister, Parson, or Priest, are become words of ignominy and contempt ? And, whatever advantages of birth and education a minister may have, yet his employment is thought enough to degrade him, and put him below every one that can pretend to the name of a gentleman ?

Again, how comes it, that those small gleanings of the church’s patrimony, which sacrilege and oppression have left us, should yet be envied, and looked upon with an evil eye ; and that a clergyman, who has spent his time, and much of his fortune, in the schools of the prophets, to fit himself for that employment in which he may be most beneficial to

mankind, should yet be maligned for a small annuity during life, which, perhaps, amounts not to the gains of the meanest tradesman? And yet, if those persons had chosen another employment, if they had taken Galen or Justinian for their masters, perhaps they would have had parts and abilities sufficient to have advanced themselves, as well as others, to wealth and honours; and would not have been envied for it. My beloved, I account him not worthy of the name of a Minister of Christ, who cannot patiently suffer injury, contempt, and envy. But, certainly, it is no good part in the people, to put these upon them: it is a shrewd token, that they have a small regard to piety and religion; and that their own souls are the things about them, for which they have the least concern. Learn, I beseech you, dear Christians, learn to take more rational measures of things. Think, how much you are indebted to the divine goodness, which has taken so great care of your everlasting happiness, as to set apart an order of men, whose business it shall be to promote and advance it. Do all that you can, to encourage and assist them in their work; give them the encouragement of your constant attendance, and assist them, by helping to instruct those children and servants, who are under your several charges. Apply yourselves frequently to them, for advice and direction, and be often putting up that important question, "What shall we do to be saved?" Yield them that submission and obedience, which is due unto them in

the Lord. Go not to church to sit as judges, and censure the sermon when you return. If you be not pleased with it, your ignorance or indisposition may be the cause, and modesty should oblige you to silence. If you be taken with what you have heard, spend not your time in talk about it; practice is the best way to commend it. Beware of that spiritual pride and conceitedness, which makes “the people to strive with their priests;”* which the prophet Hosea notes as an heinous sin. Finally, to sum up your duty in the Apostle’s words: “Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account: that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you.”†

I might, in the next place, take an occasion from what has been said, to press the great obligation that lies on patrons of churches, to seek out, and to make choice of, those whom they judge to be best qualified, for so high and weighty a charge; and might show, that it is no small guilt that he draws upon himself, who presents a person to the care of souls, of whose prudence and fidelity, it may be, he hath so little confidence, that he dare not intrust him with the management of his fortune, or the tuition of his child; while, perhaps, others are overlooked, who might be capable of doing much more service in the church, merely because they have not the good fortune to be related or recommended

* Hosea, iv. 4.

† Hebrews, xiii. 17.

to the patron, or because they have less money, or more conscience, than to bargain for the living. But I forbear this : and shall crave liberty of this venerable auditory, to take this occasion of doing something that relates to my peculiar function *, in speaking a little, to those sons of the prophets, those candidates for holy orders, whose diligence and study aim at the ministry, and who are to be employed in the vineyard of God, when the present labourers shall be called off to receive their reward.

You see, Sirs, what a dreadful and important charge it is, to which you aspire. Consider, I beseech you, what great pains are necessary, to fit and qualify you for it. Ordinary callings are not learned, without a long apprenticeship ; and will the art of governing souls be learned on a sudden ? It is not a knowledge of controversy, or the gift of eloquence, much less a strong voice and bold confidence, that will qualify you for it. The errors that abound among us, make it necessary, indeed, that you should know how to deal with the adversaries ; for the clergy are many times put to the pass the Jews were, at the building of the second temple : “ with one hand they must build the house of God, and with the other they must hold a weapon : ” † yet, certainly, your greatest work lies within, in purifying your minds, and learning that wisdom which is necessary for souls. Begin, then, I pray you, and preach to your passions, and try what good you can

* Divinity-Professor, in King's College, Aberdeen.

† Nehemiah, iv. 17.

do to your friends and neighbours. Study that gravity and seriousness, that humility and self-denial, that purity and mortification, which become those, who may one day stand in so near a relation to God, and bear so eminent a charge in his church. Be not too hasty and forward in rushing into public; it is better you be drawn than run. Nazianzen complains of some in his time, who, with profane hearts and unwashed hands, rushed into the holy function; and, before they were fit to receive the Sacrament, would take upon them to celebrate it; and though they be not come unto the age of men, if they have learned some pious words, think themselves fit to be overseers of others: *O præfecturum! O elatum animum! Sacer etiam à cunabulis Samuel! Sapientes et magistri sumus!* This, I say, was the humour of some in his days; and I am afraid the case is not much better in ours. But if you be truly sensible of what you are to undertake, you would think no time too much, to be spent in preparation for it.

It remains, yet, that I address myself briefly to you, my Reverend brethren, and Right Reverend fathers. We have been endeavouring to lay before you the importance and difficulty of your employment; and you know them, much better than we can tell you. But these things ought not to discourage you, or make you faint under the weight, but rather to animate and excite your care. As Alexander said once, of an eminent hazard he had encountered, ‘that now he had met with a danger worthy his courage:’ so may I say of your

office, that it is a business worthy of your zeal, and of the love and affection which you owe unto your blessed Master. And, indeed, you can give no greater testimony of it, than by a faithful and conscientious discharge of the duties of your calling. If your work is great, your reward is infinitely greater; and you have Omnipotence engaged in your assistance. Up and be doing, and the Lord shall be with you: only let us be careful to maintain such a deep and constant sense of the engagements under which we lie, as may awaken us unto the greatest diligence and watchfulness, both over ourselves and others.

As for the particulars of your duty, I dare not take upon me to be an instructor, who have much more need to learn my own. Yet, since I am not placed here to be altogether silent, I shall offer to you the Apostle's exhortation to Titus, and take the liberty to insist a little upon the particulars of it: "These things speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no man despise thee." These things speak. Here he points at that, which ought to be the matter of our doctrine and instruction. We are not to entertain our people with subtile speculations, metaphysical niceties, perplexed notions, and foolish questions, which engender strife; but let us speak the things which become sound doctrine. Let us frequently inculcate the great and uncontroverted truths of our religion, and trouble our people no further with controversy, than necessity requires. Let us study to

acquaint them with the tenor of the gospel-covenant, and what they must do to be saved ; to inform them of the particular duties which they owe, both to God and man : for the Apostle had before been speaking of the duties to be recommended to every one, according to their several capacities and relations. And, indeed, it were not amiss, that in catechizing, ministers would bring home the articles of faith, by practical improvements ; both teaching men their particular duties, and pressing them to the performance. But it is not enough to speak these things ; to tell men what is incumbent upon them : we must, besides, endeavour to excite them by the most powerful and effectual persuasions ; the judgment being informed, we must do all to influence the affections : and this is the proper use of our preaching ; which, though it be overvalued by those, who place all religion in hearing, yet, certainly, it is of excellent use, and ought to be managed with a great deal of care. Let the matter be weighty and grave, the method plain and clear, the expression neither soaring on the one hand, nor too familiar on the other.* Some good men are not aware, what contempt they draw on religion, by their coarse and homely allusions, and by the silly and trivial proverbs of which they make use. Nor should our expressions be too soft or effeminate, nor our pronunciation affected or childish. Reli-

* ‘ *Oratio sit pura, simplex, dilucida, et manifesta ; plena gravitatis et ponderis ; non affectatâ elegantîâ ; sed non intermissâ gratiâ.*’ — *S. Ambr. de Off. i. 22.* — ED.

gion is a rational and manly thing ; and we should strive to recommend it, with the greatest advantage. But, above all, let us study such a zeal and fervour, as, flowing from a deep sense of the things we speak, and being regulated with prudence and decency, may be fittest to reach the hearts of the hearers. The vulgar, that usually sit under the pulpit, as the excellent Herbert speaks, are commonly as hard and dead as the seats they sit on, and need a mountain of fire to kindle them. The best way is, to preach the things first to ourselves, and then frequently to recollect in whose presence we are, and whose business we are doing. And I think it no small advantage, that some of a neighbouring nation have, who make some considerable pause when they have done with a point, that they may raise their souls towards God, and that the people may renew their attention.

But, when we have done all that we can by public and general exhortation, we shall effectuate very little, without a more particular application to the persons under our charge. Interest and self-love will blind the eyes, and stop the ears, of men ; and make them shift off from themselves, those admonitions from the pulpit which are displeasing. And, therefore, we are commanded not only to teach and exhort, but also to rebuke with all authority. Now, those whom we are to rebuke, are, in the first place, persons of a different persuasion, who dissent from our religion, or withdraw from our ordinances ; and these must be dealt with very

patiently, and with much long-suffering. It is not to be expected, that a hasty conference, or an abrupt disputation, should prevail with those, who have been long habituated to false persuasions, and, perhaps, have drunk them in with the first of their serious thoughts, and religious inclinations. We must first study to combat the perverseness of their will, the prejudices of the world, the desire of victory and applause, their pre-engagement in a party, and their shame and unwillingness to yield; and strive to render them meek and pliable, and sincerely desirous to know the truth. When we have obtained this, they will be both more easily convinced, and more inexcusable, if, through weakness, they still continue in their errors. But let us never rest in having drawn over a person to our party, till we have engaged him to seriousness in the practice of religion; for if he continue a stranger to that, it is little matter whether he be Protestant or Papist, Pagan or Mahometan, or any thing else in the world: nay, the better his religion is, the more dreadful will his condemnation be. It was an excellent saying of an eminent and holy person, yet alive in our church, ‘That he would rather be instrumental, in persuading one man to be serious in religion, than the whole nation to be conformists.’ Another class, whom we have to rebuke, are, in the next place, those of our own religion, for the vices and failings of their lives. And this must be done with a great deal of courage and zeal; of prudence and discretion; of meek-

ness and love. More knowing and ingenious persons may be dealt with, sometimes, by secret insinuations, and oblique reflections, on the vices of which they are guilty; and we may sometimes seek a way to reprove their failings, by regretting and condemning our own. But that artifice is not necessary with the less educated: having professed our love and good intentions, it will be best to come directly to the point. Now, this supposes a great deal of care, to acquaint ourselves with the humours and conversation of our people; and the name of watchmen, that is given us, implies no less. And, though the lamentable vastness of some of our charges make it impossible to do all that we could wish, yet must we not fail to do all that we can. It is an excellent practice of some ministers whom I have the happiness of knowing, that seldom miss any day, wherein they do not apply themselves to some or other of their people, and treat about the affairs of their souls.

Another thing which may be implied in rebuking with all authority, is, the conscientious exercise of that authority which Christ has delegated, in the public censures and rebukes of the church. But of this I shall say no more, save only, that it were an intolerable presumption, and horrid sacrilege, to make use of these, to serve the ends of our passion and private revenge.

The last clause of the passage we cited, sounds somewhat strange: "Let no man despise thee." Surely nobody desires to be despised; and it is not

always in the power of man to hinder it. But the meaning of the words is, that there should be nothing in our carriage and deportment which may deserve contempt. We ought still to have that apology of the orator in readiness: '*Quid putem? contemptumne me? Equidem, non video quid sit, in vitâ, moribusque nostris, quod despici possit.*' There is nothing that exposes a minister to so much contempt, as a vicious and irreligious deportment. Even those who are profane themselves, and who love vice in their other companions, yet abhor it in a clergyman; as thinking it too gross and disingenuous, to practise all the week what he has been condemning on Sunday. I shall not insist upon the grosser sort of vices. *Nolo tam male ominari de ecclesiâ*; I would not bode so much evil to the church, as to imagine the clergy capable of them. I shall point but to a few things, which, though less heinous in their nature, tend to the contempt and disrespect of the clergy.

And first, the least imputation of covetousness does a great deal of mischief this way. And you know that will be reckoned covetousness in you, which is not so in others. You will be more blamed, for taking your own, than they for in-croaching on their neighbours. And therefore, to prevent this imputation, so far as the meanness of a minister's provision, and necessity of his family, will permit, he should show himself frank and liberal in his dealings, especially with the poorer sort.

Another occasion of contempt is, the too much frequenting the company of the laity, and a vain and trifling conversation among them. It was a wise saying, whoever he was that spoke it, ‘*Quotidiana clericorum cum laicis conversatio, contemptibiles ipsos reddit.*’ And that of Hierom to Nepotian is very observable, ‘*Facile contemnitur clericus, si ad prandium invitatus sæpius veniat.*’ A minister, in his conversation, ought carefully to avoid all foolish and excessive jesting, and immoderate mirth. I could never think it a good character of a clergyman, to call him a merry fellow, or a notable droll; and yet, I do not condemn all cheerfulness and freedom, nor the innocent exercise of wit: but it is one thing to make use of these now and then, when they come in our way; and another, to search and hunt after them; and those who have the knack of it, are ready enough to fall into excess.

A third thing which will bring a clergyman into contempt, is, an unallowable patience, in hearing his Master dishonoured, by the oaths and profane talk of those of whom he stands in awe. My brethren, if we had no more but the common principles of ingenuousness and honour, they might make us resent these, as greater affronts than if men should spit in our faces: and yet this is but one of the meanest engagements that lie upon us, to check these exorbitancies with the greatest severity.

I shall name but another, and it is this: when

men, on purpose to avoid this contempt, would seem to disclaim their employment, by imitating the habit and deportment of secular persons ; when they study the gentleman so much, that they forget the clergyman. If we be ashamed of our own employment, no wonder if others despise it. Far different were the thoughts of that worthy gentleman, and excellent minister, whom I named before, that sweet singer of Israel, Mr. Herbert ; who, the same night that he was admitted into the office of the ministry, said to his friend, ‘ I now look back, on my aspiring thoughts, and I think myself more happy, than if I had obtained what I so ambitiously thirsted for. And I can now behold the court with an impartial eye, and see plainly, that it is made up of fraud, and titles, and flattery, and many such other imaginary painted pleasures. My greatest ambition, from henceforth shall be, that I bring glory to my Jesus, whom I have this day taken to be my master and governor ; and I am so proud of his service, that I will always observe and obey, and do his will, and always call him, Jesus, my master. I will always condemn my birth, and any title or dignity that can be conferred upon me, when I shall compare them with the title of being a Priest, and serving at the altar of Jesus, my master.’*

I am afraid I have incroached too far on your patience. I shall close all, with a serious obtestation of our great Apostle to Timothy, which, you

* Izaak Walton’s Life of George Herbert. — ED.

may believe, I durst not utter in my own name, but in the name of the great Master of us all : “ I charge thee before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing, and his kingdom : preach the word, be instant in season, and out of season ; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long-suffering and doctrine.” And the Lord, of his mercy, so assist and prosper us all in his own work, that we may be the happy instruments of advancing his kingdom, and the welfare of souls, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

DEVOUT MEDITATIONS:

A COLLECTION OF THOUGHTS

UPON

RELIGIOUS

AND PHILOSOPHICAL SUBJECTS.

BY

THE HON. CHARLES HOW.

‘ Sir, I pray, give my brother Farrer an account of the decaying condition of my body, and tell him, I beg him to continue his daily prayers for me: and let him know, that I have considered, that God only is what he would be; and that I am, by his grace, become now so like him, as to be pleased with what pleaseth him: and tell him, that I do not repine, but am pleased with my want of health: and tell him, my heart is fixed on that place, where true joy is only to be found: and that I long to be there, and do wait for my appointed change, with hope and patience.’ — **GEORGE HERBERT.**

HOW'S DEVOUT MEDITATIONS,

8c.

I. I HERE purpose, by the grace of my good God, which I most humbly beg that he will be pleased always plentifully to afford me, to write down some meditation or reflection, as often as I can conveniently, from this time forward. And that for these two reasons : first, to oblige myself frequently to enter into a serious contemplation of the great God, and of the most proper means to render myself acceptable to him : and next, that, by help of these meditations and reflections, I may be able to make a judgment of the state and condition of my mind for the time past, and to compare it with that of the present, in order to make my life as uniform as is possible in all virtue : for all which purposes, I most humbly beg the assistance of my gracious God.

II. There is one picture which a man should be drawing all the days of his life ; the picture of God upon his soul : and, though the resemblance must needs be extremely faint and imperfect, yet, by a constant application and meditation upon the

beauties of the original, he cannot fail to make an admirable piece.

III. Prayer, unaccompanied with a fervent love of God, is like a lamp unlighted; the words of the one, without love being as unprofitable, as the oil and cotton of the other, without flame.

IV. Faith is as necessary to the soul, as the sun is to the world: were it not for these bright prolific lights, both the one and the other must remain dark and fruitless.

V. Had we, (what we can only have by a divine illumination of our reason, which I beg of my good God to vouchsafe me,) had we, I say, true notions of God, and eternity, right notions of ourselves, and of the world, they could not fail to create in us thoughts full of humility towards ourselves, full of contempt towards the world, full of the highest adoration towards God, and full of earnestness to acquire a happy eternity.

VI. The faculty of thinking justly, is a more desirable talent than that of eloquence in speaking; the one being in order to an advantage only in expectation, whereas the other is the assured mark of a mighty advantage already received; the one tends to the advancement of interest or reputation, the other to the increase of wisdom and virtue; the one may make a man more agreeable to the world, the other will infallibly render him most agreeable to himself, and, what is infinitely more valuable, most acceptable to God.

VII. My adorable God, I humbly beseech thee to accept the sacrifice I here, in all humility, and, I trust, sincerity, desire to make thee, of the remainder of my life ; to be entirely employed, with the utmost vigour, both of my soul and body, in thy service and adoration. And I humbly implore thee, to bestow upon me every grace, and every virtue, which may render me acceptable to thee, and worthy of thy service. Pardon, I beseech thee, all the heinous sins and offences of my life past, for the sake of thy blessed Son, my Saviour Jesus Christ ; and be pleased to bestow upon me, a stedfast faith, an ardent love, an humble and perfect obedience, and a will, capable of no other inclination, than what it shall continually receive from the absolute guidance of thy divine will ; to which, I beg it may be ever perfectly subservient, with all readiness and cheerfulness. And, if any action of my life, or thought of my soul, should ever, in the least, be contradictory to it, I heartily renounce both that and myself. My good God, as I could not have taken this resolution without thy particular mercy, so, I know, that I shall never be able to maintain it, without thy continual assistance. Give me, therefore, of thy great goodness, entirely to overcome all my passions, and to contract and draw all my affections into one constant and ever-flowing stream of love to thee. Let neither the world, nor life itself, be ever able to withdraw the least part of them from this channel. But, as all my thoughts

and actions are continually before thee, so I humbly beseech thee, that they may never be unworthy of thy divine presence, for Jesus Christ his sake, thy blessed Son, my merciful Redeemer.

VIII. That is an admirable expression in the first collect in the morning prayer, "Thy service is perfect freedom." And a noble freedom it is indeed, to have the soul released from the insupportable slavery of ignorance and vice, and set at liberty, to range in the spacious and delicious plains of wisdom and virtue; to have it delivered from the harsh and turbulent tyranny of insulting passions, and established under the gentle and delightful government of right reason. O my good God, grant my soul this happy freedom, and set my heart at liberty, that I may cheerfully run the ways of thy blessed commandments, and suffer no impediment to obstruct my course!

IX. Nothing can be truly valuable, that will not be valuable an hundred years together. To demonstrate this truth to our understanding, we have but to consider the millions of years that have preceded this hundred years, and the vast eternity that preceded them; the millions of years that must succeed this hundred years, and the boundless eternity that will succeed them: and, after a serious and just comparison between the one and the other, we shall find a hundred years a most contemptible portion of time. After the same manner, we have but to consider riches, honour, reputation, and even life itself; they must all

have an end, as to any particular person, within a much shorter compass, than that of an hundred years : and, upon such a consideration, we shall be forced to acknowledge, that our contempt would be bestowed upon them, with much more reason and justice, than that high esteem and veneration which most men think their due. And it is, indeed, much more worthy of a wise man, to labour to despise, rather than to procure them, and to seek his felicity, more in the contempt, than in the enjoyment of them.*

X. The great uncertainty and inconstancy so generally observed in mankind, is, doubtless, from this cause, that all their fancies and imaginations spring, not from the truth and reality of things, but from their passions ; which, being very changeable and irregular, can never produce regular ideas, any more than a crooked rule can be the measure of a straight line. A mind surrounded with passions, is in as miserable a condition as a country, too weak to defend itself, seated in the midst of many powerful princes, continually contending for the possession of it : sometimes it is surprised by one, sometimes by another ; but it is never long under the government of the same master ; nor can it have the benefit to be governed by settled and

* In this and in a subsequent meditation (sect. xv.) such as are conversant in the writings of Epictetus, and Marcus Antoninus, will discern a great connection between the reasoning of our author and that of the ancient Stoics. FIRST ED.

regular laws, which will always be altered by every new intruder. In this deplorable state, is the mind surrounded with powerful passions ; sometimes subdued by one, and sometimes by another, but always a slave ; ever variable and changing, but never for the better. Now, that this is the true cause of man's inconstancy, evidently appears from the following considerations. What different ideas arise in the mind, from the two passions of prodigality and avarice ? How unlike are the images drawn upon it by the passion of love, to those which are drawn by malice and revenge ? Nay, at different times, how unlike will the same passion make a man to himself ? How strange and ridiculous a change does pride make in a man : one hour, it shall humble him to act the part of a base mean flatterer, making most servile courtship and addresses, to some powerful favourite ; the next hour, raising him to the highest pitch of insolence, it shall make him look with contempt and disdain upon all whom he thinks his inferiors ? When a man is thus governed by his passions, it is impossible to know any thing of him certainly, but his name : for, like a Proteus, he is continually transformed by those passions, into some new monster ; and this changeableness in himself, will make his judgment uncertain and variable ; at one time approving, what he dislikes at another ; the same things becoming, alternately, the objects of his pleasure and displeasure ; eagerly pursued one day, and rejected the next ; and thus, things continually change their shapes and appearances, ac-

according as his deceitful passions shall think fit to represent them. Now, it is easy to imagine, how the mind must labour with anxiety, under these false representations of things made by the passions; and what a comfort and support it would be, to be enabled to steer a steady course: to be able, truly to distinguish good from evil, to chuse the one, and refuse the other; and, having made a right choice of things pleasant and profitable, to be sure to have them constant, and, as such, always to be approved and embraced by the judgment. Now these true representations of things to the mind, can be made only by illuminated reason; and we may be sure, that, such images as she draws of them, will have a true likeness. And, if she were to copy them over again ten thousand times, she would draw them exactly with the same lineaments and features; for, where the things themselves do not alter, we may be sure her pencil will not vary.

XI. In order to pass a right and just judgment in any case whatsoever, it is necessary to have unbiassed affections. How, then, can a man, captivated and inflamed with the love of sensual pleasures, be capable of giving an impartial judgment, between God and the world? Or how is a man, with affections enslaved by vice, fit to judge between that and virtue? And yet, men, thus incapacitated to be judges in these cases, are often very confidently passing sentence: and, what is worse, too many, seemingly unconcerned spectators, are apt to be persuaded, that their judgment is equitable.

XII. Meditation is the life of virtue, as virtue is the life of the soul. It is the conduit, by which a happy and delightful communication is maintained, between God and the soul; through which, the graces and blessings of God descend to the soul, and through which, the ardour, the praises, and adoration of the soul, ascend to God. It is the exercise of the soul, which makes it, and preserves it, vigorous and healthful; without which, it would soon become heavy and languid, void of pleasure, and weary of its own being; and this uneasiness would oblige it to seek its satisfaction in vain and trifling entertainments, and debase it, at last, even to folly and vice.

XIII. I suppose these words, "Pray without ceasing," may very well be interpreted according to the literal meaning. For, if the soul can once get an absolute dominion over its passions, keeping continually a strict guard over them; if it be always duly prepared, and have, in their just degrees, all the requisites of prayer, which are faith, repentance, love, humility, obedience, thankfulness, resignation, charity, and sincerity; though the man be not always upon his knees, yet, his conversation will, in such a manner, be in heaven, his soul will be so abstracted from the world, as to be almost continually exercising itself, in some act either of praise, petition, or adoration of God. Which, no doubt, his infinite goodness will accept as an incessant prayer, though it be not accompanied with all the outward circumstances of devotion: which, to be

sure, will not be neglected neither, by such a one, at proper seasons. And, in reality, a formal and customary kneeling, a lifting up the hands and eyes to heaven without the heart, a cold and careless uttering of words, are but the dead carcass of prayer. The life of it consists, in the combination of the forementioned qualifications; without which, it can neither be satisfactory to a wise man, nor, it is to be feared, acceptable to the Almighty God. Whom I humbly beg, to instruct and enable me both how and what to pray; that none of my addresses to Him, may be unworthy of so great and glorious a being.

XIV. Had men but the same curiosity in their inquiries relating to the essence of God, and the immortality of their own souls, that they have in other philosophical matters, it would carry them earnestly to implore his assistance; which is absolutely necessary, in order to make the experiments requisite for such sublime discoveries. By the help of these experiments, a mighty progress would soon be made, in those most profitable sciences of wisdom and virtue; which, indeed, are the only sciences worthy of our time and pains; the only ones, that can conduct us to substantial happiness in this life, and to that which is eternal in the next. But happiness, temporal and eternal, are too generally neglected, through our ignorance of their beauties and advantages. Now, the experiment I would have all men try, is this: first, having made a serious and sincere application to God, to betake themselves heartily

to subdue all their passions, which are so many clouds and fatal impediments to the mind's advancement in this most excellent knowledge ; to purify the soul, as much as possible, from all vicious and impure affections and inclinations ; and, after these things are done, it were hard to conjecture, what infinitely profitable, and consequently delightful, discoveries she would be enabled to make, of her own nature, and, in how extraordinary a manner, the good God would be pleased to reveal himself to her, being thus purified. Those happy few alone can tell, who have made the experiment ; none but they can know, what evidences and assurances of their own immortality are conveyed by that Divine Being, to souls thus disposed to receive them ; what glances of his eternal brightness and glory, he is pleased to dart upon them, for their comfort and encouragement ; and what extraordinary measures of faith, how nearly approaching to certainty, he may vouchsafe, for the completion of their felicity, to afford them, by the more intimate communication and operation of His blessed Spirit.

XV. It is of great use to reflect, that the riches, honours, and pleasures, which we are apt so eagerly to pursue, when past, leave no advantage behind them ; and that all the pains, miseries, and troubles, which we so carefully avoid, when they depart from us, carry all their mischiefs along with them.* So that it is equal, when a man comes to

* The same sentiment has been finely expressed by Musonius ; who was honoured with banishment by Nero. I take

die, whether he spent all his time in pleasures and delights, lying at his ease on beds of down, or whether he had lain all his lifetime tormented upon a rack ; whether he had lived a king, or a beggar : so great are the vanities of the one condition ; so short, the miseries of the other.*

XVI. That a man should not find in his heart to betake himself to the solid comforts of a virtuous life, for fear of interrupting or spoiling the gay diversions of the world, is just as reasonable, as that a man should be so much delighted with the neatness of his garden, and charmed with the variety of plants and flowers, and its other pretty contrivances, that he could not find in his heart to deface it, though he were sure to discover a mine of gold by digging it up.

XVII. Whosoever would be wise, and consequently happy, must raze out of his mind all those false mistaken notions which have been imprinted there from his infancy ; and must endeavour to expel from thence, that pernicious infection of error, which it has been so long hatching from erroneous customs and examples, and which, if too long neglected, will prove fatal to it. Among ten thousand other things, of which we have mistaken

the liberty of transferring the passage, from the vast commonplace book of Aulus Gellius : —

Αν τι πράξης καλον μετα πονου ὁ μὲν ποιος οἴχεται, το δε καλον μενει.*

Αν τι ποιήσης αισχρον μετ' ἡδονης το μὲν ἡδὺ οἴχεται, το δε αισχρον μενει. —*

Aul. Gell. xvi. 2. — ED.

* See medit. ix. and the note there given, at the foot of the page.

notions, I will make choice of life and death, for my present consideration. How charmingly desirable does our fancy paint the one, and with what dreadful deformity does it disguise the other? And how uneasy are these wrong conceptions apt to make us, by fixing our affections upon that life, which we must not long enjoy, and raising our aversion to that death, which we cannot possibly avoid? Our great business, then, in order to make our days serene and happy, is, to remove our affection from life, and our aversion from death. And, to compass this, we must deface those images of them both, which our deluding fancies have drawn upon our minds, and set ourselves diligently to trace out new lines, and more resembling features. And first, to consider that gaudy blaze of life, which appears so fair, and shines so bright; which is extinguished almost as soon as kindled, and, by its speedy decay, becomes contemptible: let us paint it, binding and fettering the soul, and detaining it in a dark uncomfortable prison, darkened by ignorance, and made uncomfortable by folly. And let death be drawn in its natural shape, as the friend and deliverer of the soul, approaching to release it from this hated confinement, and to put it into the possession of that desirable liberty, after which it had so long been languishing. What we improperly call life, is no more of life, than that which a child has in the womb; who cannot properly be said to enter into life, till it is born, and the midwife is thought to do it no unkind office, in

bringing it into the world. Why, then, should we think death our enemy, for doing the same friendly office to the soul; which cannot truly be said to enter into life, till it enters into eternity; since that only is worthy to be called life, which is eternal, and to which it can attain, only by the kind assistance of death? Then, those glimmering sparks of life which it had here below, will be kindled into a glorious unextinguishable flame. And, instead of those faint rays of pleasure, which, by the means of faith and virtue, it pleased the great and good God to make shine upon it here, eternal streams of joy and brightness shall then flow in upon it, from the incomprehensible glories of the divine presence.*

* ‘ He that is no fool, but can consider wisely, if he be in love with this world, we need not despair, but that a witty man might reconcile him with tortures, and make him think charitably of the rack, and be brought to dwell with vipers and dragons, and entertain his guests with the shrieks of mandrakes, cats, and screech-owls, with the filing of iron, and the harshness of rending of silk, or to admire the harmony that is made by a herd of evening wolves, when they miss their draught of blood in their midnight revels. The groans of a man in a fit of the stone, are worse than all these; and the distractions of a troubled conscience are worse than those groans; and yet a careless merry sinner is worse than all that.

‘ But if we could, from one of the battlements of heaven, espy, how many men and women, at this time, be fainting and dying for want of bread, how many young men are hewn down by the sword of war, how many poor orphans are now weeping over the graves of their fathers, by whose life they were enabled to eat: if we could but hear, how many mariners and passengers are, at this present, in a storm, and shriek out, because their keel dashes against a rock, or bulges under them; how

XVIII. Faith is the brightness of the great God shining upon the soul : and virtue, which is nothing else but a combination of love and obedience to Him, is a light proceeding from faith. They both ebb and flow together ; and when faith rushes in plentifully, and rises high in the soul, virtue will maintain a proportionable height ; but, as faith retires and grows low, virtue will retreat and sink also. Now our passions are the black thick clouds, that cause so frequent and tedious eclipses of this light of faith : and, by their interposition, deprive the soul of its only comfort. They are those fierce and strong winds, which keep back this tide from flowing in upon the soul, both to refresh and enrich it ; which, I think, is argument sufficient, for the absolute necessity of the utter extirpation of our pernicious passions.*

XIX. How long is the soul kept and nourished in ignorance of itself, and of its original ; like a child of noble extraction, obliged, by some misfortune, to be concealed, and educated as their own, by poor peasants. Believing himself to be of no

many people there are, that weep with want, and are mad with oppression, or, are desperate by too quick a sense of a constant infelicity ; in all reason, we should be glad to be out of the noise and participation of so many evils. This is a place of sorrows and tears, of great evils and a constant calamity : let us remove from hence, at least in affections and preparation of mind.' — *Jer. Taylor, Holy Dying*, vol. iv. p. 367. — ED.

* When I speak of the extirpation of passions, I mean only the restraint of the vicious extravagance of our affections. See sect. xxiii.

higher birth, the child entertains no other than mean and low thoughts and designs, suitable to such a condition. But, so soon as his true parents are made known to him, he quickly banishes from his mind all that is base and ignoble, and, animated by the knowledge of his true condition, conceives such thoughts as are answerable to it. It is faith which makes this discovery to the soul. And no sooner acquaints it, that it has the great God for its parent, than it discards all base, ungenerous designs, and renounces its former trifling pleasures, and mean affections, disdaining the low objects of its love and desire. It is immediately filled with noble and aspiring thoughts; all its aims and designs, from thenceforth, become great and elevated, and worthy of its divine birth.

XX. It is wonderful that pride should be so natural to man; that it should take root so deep, in so impotent and helpless a creature. For, when rightly considered, all human power is entirely founded upon human weakness: it is not the empire over beasts, but over his fellow-creature man, that is the subject of his ambition, and cause of his pride. And this reflection ought to be his mortification, that he himself is liable to all the injuries which he can offer to another; and that it is the weakness and infirmity of human nature, common alike, to himself and others, which renders any man obnoxious to his cruelty or oppression.

XXI. Pride, by a great mistake, is commonly taken for greatness of soul, as if the soul was to be

ennobled by vice. Now, that pride is one of the most enormous of vices, I think no reasonable man will dispute ; it is the base offspring of weakness, imperfection, and ignorance ; since, were we not weak and imperfect creatures, we should not be destitute of the knowledge of ourselves ; and, had we that knowledge, it were impossible we should be proud. But, on the contrary, genuine humility is the certain mark of a bright reason, and elevated soul ; for, in truth, it is their natural consequence. When we come to have our minds cleared by reason, from the thick mists that our disorderly passions cast about them ; when we come, to discern more perfectly, and consider more nearly, the immense power and goodness, the infinite glory and duration, of God ; when we come, to make a comparison between his perfections, and our own frailty and weakness, and the shortness and uncertainty of our beings, — then, we should humble ourselves even to the dust, before Him. Can the greatest monarch upon earth, free himself from the least mischief, incident to the meanest of men ? Can he, by his own power, give vigour to his body, or length to his life ? Can he free the body from pains and diseases, or the life from vexation and trouble ? If not, what excellence has he to boast of, above other men ? What advantage has he to be proud of, in relation to his fellow-creatures ? Custom has made a wide difference, indeed, between man and man ; but it is a difference purely fanciful, and not real ; for it must be some intrinsic

worth in any creature, that gives it the preference to another. Titles, riches, and fine houses, contribute no more to making one man better than another, than the finer saddle to making the better horse. And it truly shows a poor spirit, for one man to take these paltry advantages of another. If he is ambitious to excel his fellows, let it be in something that belongs to himself, something that demonstrates him to be a better creature. Let him not think, like a false jewel among ignorant people, to derive a value from being set in gold. Let him contend in virtue, which alone is capable of putting a great and true difference between man and man. Whosoever gains the advantage here, has reason to value it, though it will never make him proud.

XXII. At first, it seems a little strange, that reason, which is always constant and the same, should make such various impressions upon the minds of men. But, when we come to consider, it is no more to be wondered at, that men differ in their judgments and opinions, than that they are unlike in their faces. For the same argument must have different effects, according to men's different understandings; as the same distant object appears differently to several men, according as it happens to strike each man's sight. That which seems green to one, may appear blue to another : * so that, till the sense of seeing becomes uniform in several

* I recollect having read, several years ago, in the 'Transactions of the Literary and Philosophical Society of Manchester,' a very interesting paper, describing an extraordinary organic hallucination of this kind. — ED.

men, it is impossible that any object should have the same appearance to them. And it holds alike, as to the operation of reason and arguments, upon the mind. Reason, we know, is uniform; and whatever disputes concerning it arise, it is not that there are really different appearances in reason, but the difference is, in our conception and understandings. Reason is not various, though our weak judgments concerning her are so. If the sight of all men were alike and true, every object must necessarily appear alike to them, and such as really they are, without any deception; and, in like manner, were the minds of all men alike, and rightly disposed, all arguments and reasons would work alike upon them all. But interest, partiality, pride, and other ungovernable affections, cause all the disorders in the mind; and, consequently, in the world.

XXIII. The passions and affections* of the mind are commonly confounded one with another, and promiscuously used, as two different words to signify the same thing: which I think prejudicial, and apt to lead men into great and fatal mistakes. For, since some passions only are taken to be vicious, and others allowed to be innocent; as, by such nice distinctions, the difference between them is not easily discovered; so, by men's partiality, and indulgence to their own frailties and their pleasure, it is to be feared, that such passions only will be by them interpreted to be vicious, as do not thwart their inclinations, and to which they themselves are

* The passions and affections are innocent or vicious, according to their degrees or tendency.

not greatly addicted. By this means, vicious passions may attack us in disguise, and, at distance, may hang out friendly colours; but, when they approach to assault us, we shall perceive to our smart, that they are enemies. Besides, I think it is treating vice rather too favourably, to let it shelter itself under the same name with innocence. Therefore, for my own private assistance, I shall take the liberty to make a distinction, between affection and passion; that, when the just boundaries between these two very different territories, are fairly marked out, I may the better be able to keep within the limits of the one, without making incursions into the other. Now, I take the affections of the soul to be the life and vigour of it; by whose warmth and activity, all its springs receive their power of moving and acting; and, without which, the soul could no more subsist, than the body without the soul: for it is by the help of the affections, that it moves to good or evil, that it acts virtuously or viciously. The affections may be called the fire of the soul; which, wisely managed, is ready to serve it for all sorts of beneficial purposes; but, carelessly neglected, or foolishly employed, is capable of breaking into unruly flames, to man's utter ruin and destruction. So long as this fire is under the management of reason, it is both useful and necessary, and still retains the name of *affection*: but, when it becomes disorderly, and breaks loose from the government of reason, then it becomes pernicious and vicious, and deservedly assumes the

name of *passion*, which signifies the disorder and anguish of the soul. When, therefore, at any time, I speak of the necessity of eradicating, or extinguishing the *passions*, I do not mean to eradicate, or extinguish the *affections* of the soul, without which it cannot subsist; but to eradicate and extinguish its disorders and anguish, with which it cannot subsist comfortably.

XXIV. Human reason, of itself, has not power sufficient to conduct a man to wisdom and virtue. These are of so noble and sublime a nature, that nothing but the divine influence can produce them in the soul of man. Virtue may, therefore, be termed a new affection, not born in the soul, but introduced into it by the divine influence; which moves a man to love those things that are pleasing to God, and to hate and reject whatsoever may offend him.

XXV. Man is both born and nourished in error: he imbibes not only his nurse's milk, but her errors: he receives from his parents, not his being only, but, together with it, their errors also: he is not only diverted with the conversation of his companions, but infected with their mistakes. Thus error takes the earliest possession of the soul, and never quits her hold, till obliged to it, either by the grace of God, or by the stroke of death. Nor is it any wonder, in these circumstances, that man should be ignorant of the right ends of life, and of his true business in the world. It is to be feared, that too many have no other notion, than that they are placed in the world, like

beasts in a pasture, to devour its product; and that their great work is to endeavour to excel each other in large possessions, rich clothes, stately houses, costly furniture, splendid equipage, delicate tables, and such other trinkets of pride and luxury, and incitements to violence and injustice. And this is the noble ambition, that kind parents strive to kindle in their beloved children! Great God! that men's understandings and ambition should be so short-sighted, as neither to see, nor aim at any thing, beyond the poor extent of these impertinent vanities! And that any man can think that thou hast given him a being, to be wholly employed in these pursuits! That thou hast bestowed reason upon him, only that he may sully it with his passions; as if the use of it were, not to give him the pre-eminence over beasts, but to render him inferior to them; for, doubtless, a rational brute is the worst of brutes, as having larger capacities for mischief. It is strange that men can think, that they receive blessings from God, not to make them more mindful of him, or to excite their addresses to him, but to make them neglect and forget him! That his gifts are bestowed upon them, to rob the great Benefactor of that affection, which should be the usual consequence of his beneficence! And that the faint and forced adorations of their last breath, are the only tribute due to God, as it is, too often, the only one that falls to his share!

XXVI. All men have some chief aim superior to

all others ; the compassing of which, is the great employment of their thoughts, and labour of their souls. Other designs are carried on only leisurely and accidentally, without any great concern ; the soul being entirely bent upon the success of that object, which it has made choice of, as its grand business and satisfaction. The object of the ambitious man, is power and honour ; that of the luxurious man, is sensual pleasure ; that of the covetous man, is the increase of his wealth. But that of the wise man, is the increase of his virtue. He looks upon the world as a stage, where he is placed by the great Creator, to act his part ; and upon life, as the time allowed him to act it in. He is diligently careful of all his actions and behaviour, knowing that his fate depends upon his performances. He values not the hissings or applauses of the inconstant ignorant multitude ; but is most industriously solicitous to obtain the approbation of the Almighty Spectator.

XXVII. Man is the only creature in the world, whose happiness is imperfect, and who is sensible that it is so ; who has something in him, that disdains the imperfection of his own being, and languishes after a condition more perfect. Were he, like other animals, composed only of flesh and blood, he would find no more faults with his being, than they do with theirs ; since the matter of which his body and theirs is made, is not capable of such reflections. But these are the secret repinings of the soul, by which she plainly discovers herself ; and our attentive observations of her, will soon

turn into demonstrations that we have such a principle existent in us. And, since it is natural for all beings to seek and thirst after happiness, it is necessary to know where the seat of happiness is fixed. It is the want of this knowledge, which makes us waste so much time in vain pursuits, and unprofitable attempts; endeavouring to confine happiness to the body, which is a prison too weak to hold it. The senses which conduct it thither, are too feeble, long to guard and detain it: it is always attempting to make its escape; and what is worse, it never misses its aim. Besides, if it has no other existence than the body, it must be very short-lived, and, in a contemptible portion of time, must perish with the body. A man that is of this opinion, must be sure to keep his thoughts always steadily confined within the compass of this life and world. For, if they happen to wander beyond it, they will enter into dark uncomfortable regions, that will afford them nothing but black and dismal prospects; which too many unthinking people find by sad experience. Now virtue, which I may define to be the science of happiness, will give us true notions of happiness, and teach us, that its true seat is in the soul. This, is of a capacity large enough to contain it, and of a duration lasting enough to preserve it to eternity: there, it may rise to unmeasurable heights, without restraint; it can never overburthen or overpower the immortal spirit. It is the poor feeble body only, that is not able to support it; too weak, to bear the rapid and violent motions of

the soul, when filled and agitated with an excessive joy. The heart is capable of supporting but a small insignificant measure of enjoyment ; it may easily be overcharged with it, like a gun with powder, and be rent and destroyed with its irresistible efforts ; according to the several degrees of which, it often occasions ecstasies, swoonings, and death. The heart can no more sustain immoderate joy, than immoderate grief ; the one is destructive by too much dilation, the other by too great a depression ; and it is equal, whether the vessel be crushed by too strong a pressure without, or torn in pieces by too violent an extension from within ; whichever of them happens, the frail cask is broken, and life spilt.

XXVIII. In case of temptation, it is a prudent caution to avoid the encounter, when we are conscious of weakness, or unable to withstand it. But I do not think it the part of a generous mind, to rest satisfied in a safety, that is always owing to flight. It is much braver to keep the mind continually exercised, and inured by imaginary conflicts, till it is taught and enabled to overcome in those that are real. That whatsoever temptation offers itself, the soul may be intrepid ; and, coming bravely to the encounter, may know how to be victorious by its own force and virtue.*

* What is here so forcibly and beautifully recommended, would seem to be included in that pithy injunction of the Apostle, *Meditate upon these things*, 1 Tim. iv. 15. The Editor trusts he may be pardoned, for extracting the following elucidative passage :—

XXIX. It is a preposterous resolution that some people take, of deferring to be virtuous till they grow old, imagining, that wisdom is the natural consequence of old age; as if that which is the greatest imperfection of human nature, were most proper to confer upon us its highest perfection.

‘The verb μελετᾶω, which, from the want of a more adequate representative, we render by the English verb to *meditate*, has a very comprehensive meaning. Among rhetoricians, it includes all the previous discipline, study, examination of the subject, invention of topics, provision of materials, distribution of arguments, selection and arrangement of words, in short, all the kinds and degrees of preparation which the orator employs, that he may be qualified to plead with ability and success. In military affairs, and agonistic games, it embraces the scientific training, the study of tactics both in theory and practice, the habituation both of mind and body to endurance of fatigue, the performance of all manly and warlike exercises in time of peace, the indispensable though mimic conflicts, of countrymen with countrymen, and friends with friends, in order, when the real conflict shall arrive, to a vigorous opposition to the foe or the rival, in the arena or the field. And with moral writers, both profane and sacred, it has a meaning quite analogous to the former two: it denotes that thoughtful investigation of goodness and virtue, which flows from a heartfelt interest in the subject, and which issues in uniform, consistent, and exemplary practice; the forecasting, also, of probable or possible contingencies, which may bring our virtue into trial; the habitual comparison of means with ends, of our duties with our powers; the frequent resolution of human obligation at large, and of our own special obligations in particular, into their several parts and degrees, with respect to our God, our neighbour, and ourselves; the continued moral recollection of the several relations in which we stand, that there may be, so far as possible, no excess, and no defect, in our dealings and communications with our fellow-men.’—*Practical Theology*, vol. ii. p. 184.

Long observation, indeed, gives experience ; but that is a thing very different from wisdom ; though it is the utmost advantage which old age can pretend to bestow upon us. Now, it is to be considered, that virtue is a habit of the mind, to be acquired with great industry and application ; to be forcibly introduced into the soul, in opposition to vice, which, it is to be feared, has obtained long and undisturbed possession, and which must be dislodged with great difficulty, and by a persevering resolution. Now, this is not to be effected in a little time ; the inhabitants are all of its side ; and it has so carefully strengthened the place, that the siege must be both long and doubtful. It is likely to be an achievement, which will not only require the vigour of youth, but more time also than old age has to bestow upon it. The chief end of a virtuous life, is to give us as near a resemblance, as is possible, to God, to make us pure as he is pure ; that is, to raise us to the utmost degree of purity, of which our frail nature is capable. Now, to defer this work till we grow old, is to resolve to be as unlike God as is possible ; in a confident, but very ridiculous assurance, that old age will help our deformity, will give us a very good resemblance of Him, and will, in an instant, confer upon us purity like his, after we have wilfully passed our whole life in contracting pollution. So wonderful a change as this, it is indeed possible, for Him who can do all things, though not for

age, to make ; but it is such a change, as no man can reasonably expect. Can we think, when the purest and sprightliest part of life has been drawn off in the service of vice, that the dregs are an offering fit for God ? Can we think it, then only, fit to please him, when we are unable to offend him any longer ? This is no better, than being cast upon God Almighty by age and infirmity, against our will ; like mariners, who are forced, by storms and tempests, upon a coast which they never intended to come near.

XXX. It is generally believed, that the deluge occasioned the shortness of man's life ; which is much contracted since that time, in comparison of its length, in the time of the antediluvian patriarchs. The viciousness of mankind occasioned the flood : and, very probably, God thought fit to drown the world, for these two reasons : first, to punish the then living offenders ; and, next, to prevent men's plunging into those prodigious depths of impiety, for all future ages. For, if, in the short term of life, which is now allotted to mankind, men are capable of being puffed up to such an insolent degree of pride and folly, as to forget God and their own mortality, his power and their own weakness : if a prosperity, bounded by threescore and ten years (and what mortal's prosperity, since the deluge, ever lasted so long ?) can swell the mind of so frail a creature, to such a prodigious size of vanity, what boundaries could be set to his arrogance, if his life and prosperity, like that of the patriarchs, were likely to

continue eight or nine hundred years together? If, under the existing circumstances of life, men's passions can rise so high; if the present, short, and uncertain enjoyments of the world, are able to occasion such an extravagant pride, such unmeasurable ambition, such sordid avarice, such barbarous rapine and injustice, such malice and envy, and so many other detestable things, which compose the numerous train of vice, — how, then, would the passions have flamed, and to what a monstrous stature would every vice have grown, if those enjoyments which provoked and increased them, were of eight or nine hundred years' duration? If eternal happiness, and eternal punishment, are able to make no stronger impressions upon men's minds, so near at hand, it may well be imagined, that, at so great a distance, they would have made no impression at all; that eternal happiness would have been entirely divested of its allurements, and eternal misery of its terrors; and the great Creator would have been deprived of that obedience and adoration, which are so justly due to him from his creatures. Thus, the inundation of vice, has, in some measure, by the goodness of God, been prevented by an inundation of water. That which was the punishment of one generation, may be said to have been the preservation of all those which have succeeded. For, if life had not been thus clipped, one Tiberius, one Caligula, one Nero, one Louis the Fourteenth, had been sufficient to have destroyed the whole race of mankind: each of whose lives,

had they been ten times as long, and the mischiefs they occasioned multiplied by that number, it might easily be computed how great a plague one such long-lived monster would have been to the world.

XXXI. Men are apt to place very narrow limits to human virtue ; and, as a reason for their so doing, they plead the frailty of human nature ; which, they pretend, has such scanty bounds set to it, that it is in vain to attempt to enlarge them. Men may flatter themselves if they please with such pretences ; but, I doubt, they will not pass for warrantable excuses of our carelessness and negligence. I doubt, it will appear, that if the stream of our affections is too small to water a larger field of virtue, it is because it is diverted for other purposes, into other channels. Where interest and ambition lead men, they can break through the bounds of possibility, and march far into the territories even of seeming impossibility. But, when virtue is our conductor, we are not ashamed to stop, long before we arrive within sight of those borders. In the former case, men can depend upon the help of that imaginary idol Fortune ; but, in the latter, they dare not rely upon the promised and sure assistance of the all-powerful God. The riches and magnificence of a Persian king, the wealthy treasures of the far distant Indies, could so inflame the soul of Alexander the Great, as to make him perform actions incredible, and surmount difficulties, seemingly insurmountable. But the

eternal joys of heaven, the infinitely glorious and inestimable treasures of the great King of kings, have not, it seems, charms sufficient to kindle in our souls the same ardour. So much is the thirst of fame greater than the thirst of virtue ; so much, to our confusion be it spoken, are our passions stronger than our faith.

XXXII. A wise man must take care, not only to govern his own passions, but to prevent himself from being governed by the passions of other men : for, if we must be subject to passion, it is equal whether it be our own, or that of other people. When the right way is lost, it is no matter to which hand we wander. Now it may happen, in many cases, that, when a man has withstood his own passions, and acted in conformity to reason, yet other men, guided by passion, not by reason, finding fault with his actions, will be apt to give him a dislike of his own proceedings, unless he be very well fixed and confirmed in his principles and reason. This is a matter which very well deserves our utmost attention ; since upon it depends, not only the peace and tranquillity of our lives, but our virtue also ; which will be in danger to be shaken, if the mind be not steady, and proof against the reproaches and derisions of the world.

XXXIII. Most men are ready enough to reckon up the income of their estates, and compute how it will answer their several expenses. But few employ their arithmetic to calculate the value and income of their life and time ; or consider how

they may be expended to the best advantage. In these, though they are justly accounted the more valuable treasure, the beggar has as large a revenue as the king. The gracious God has distributed equal portions of life and time to all degrees and conditions of men, though not to every particular man the same proportion; and the sum total of this, is threescore and ten years, all beyond that, and many years also on this side of it, being but labour and sorrow. Now, we have to consider, how much of this time is likely to be spent in happiness and enjoyment, and how much will be employed to less pleasing purposes. Which may be thus easily computed. Twenty years may be deducted for education, which is a time of discipline and restraint, and young people are never easy till they are got over it; and the last ten years of the seventy, may be deducted for sickness and infirmities, which very often are the portion of those years: so that, these thirty taken out of life, there remain but forty; out of which, a third part, being at least eight hours in the four and twenty, which amounts to about fourteen years more, must be deducted for sleep, that sister and image of death; and then there remain but twenty-six; out of which, when the requisite allowances are taken, for the time we are made uneasy with our own passions, and tormented with the passions of other people; for what passes in sickness, pain, loss, and affliction; for what we consume in anxiety, respecting things that must inevitably happen, and what

in anguish, for accidents irrecoverably past ; for what passes in stupid and insipid amusements, or brown studies, without either trouble or pleasure : when this is summed up, I doubt, we shall not render a much better account of the poor inconsiderable remainder ; it being generally unprofitably wasted in vice and vanity.

XXXIV. I suppose men's passions not only make them miserable in this world, but are no inconsiderable part of their torment in hell. For the body limits and restrains the soul ; so that the flame either of virtue or vice, cannot, in this life, blaze to an excessive degree. But, when it is freed from that confinement, the passions become ten thousand times more furious and raging, being let loose by divine vengeance, to torment and rack the vicious soul : as, on the other hand, every virtue is heightened and increased immeasurably, to the infinite joy of the soul that is virtuous. For, it is to be supposed, that the inclinations, either to virtue or vice, which the soul has at its departure out of the body, are not changed, but exceedingly augmented and strengthened, after its separation. It is highly necessary, therefore, to endue the soul with an habitual virtue, before it passes into eternity, where habits are not altered, but improved.

XXXV. The soul agitated with passions, fares like a weak bird in a stormy day. She is not able to make a straight flight, but is tossed from the track she would pursue, being lost and carried in the air at the pleasure of the winds. In this con-

dition is the soul ; till, by a constant meditation upon the great God, and application to Him, it has obtained a strong and vigorous faith to ballast and strengthen it, and enable it to maintain the straight and steady course of virtue.*

XXXVI. Reputation and praise may be useful supports to a weak virtue ; but, when it becomes strong, it must cast them away, with the same indignation and disdain, that a child does his leading-strings, when he has strength enough to walk without them.

XXXVII. It is a contradiction to imagine, that reputation or praise is a suitable recompence for virtue. This is a reward, which nothing but vanity can make acceptable : it declares a man both foolish and vicious, who can be pleased and satisfied with it ; and proves, that his supposed merit is owing only to his pride. True virtue, as it has no other aim than the service and honour of the great God, so the least and only recompence to which it aspires, is his approbation and favour.

XXXVIII. It gives a greatness of soul, truly noble, to a virtuous man, to consider how honourable he is made, by his being the servant of so great and glorious a master. With what generous thoughts, what firm and graceful confidence, does the assurance of His favour and love inspire him ? How much does he disdain to increase the gaudy slavish crowd, that so assiduously attend the levees of poor frail princes, whose beings are no better

* See Jeremy Taylor. *Return of Prayers* ; Sermon v. p. 33.—Ed.

than his own? With how much indignation does he despise a fawning courtship, and attendance, upon insolent and vicious favourites, scorning to pay such homage to vice? How contemptible do the vain interests and pursuits, hopes and fears, desires and aversions, that so much busy and disturb the world, appear to him, who has his soul enlightened and enlarged with the love of its great Creator, and merciful Redeemer?

XXXIX. It is wonderful to consider how vast a progress the ancient philosophers made in virtue, apparently by the help of natural reason only. Many of them, indeed, were not ignorant of the inability of human reason, singly, to make men virtuous; but were conscious of the necessity of divine assistance, in order to so great a performance. And I make no question, but many of them had that assistance to the consummation of their own virtue. It is astonishing to reflect upon the strength of their faith, both as to the existence of a deity, and the immortality of the soul; and what surprising effects it had upon them, in rendering their lives highly virtuous, in begetting in them the utmost contempt of the world, and the most profound reverence and adoration of God. With how much bravery and courage, in those cloudy times, without the help and direction of that compass of revelation which we enjoy, did those bold and generous navigators sail in the wide and vast sea of virtue? What great and useful discoveries did they there make? What rich mines did they lay open to the world, if men had but

possessed industry enough to have wrought them, and wisdom sufficient to have exhausted their treasures? But, O merciful God! how much greater and plainer discoveries hast thou, in thine infinite goodness, been pleased to reveal to mankind, by the example and doctrine of the blessed Jesus; who has brought life and immortality out of thick clouds and darkness, not only into a clearer and brighter, that were to say too little, but into an open and manifest light! Whose gospel is a system of so refined a philosophy, so exalted a wisdom, and the divine characters that shine in it are so conspicuously legible, that nothing can hinder us from reading them, but the darkest ignorance and blackest corruption. From both which, I beseech thee, O blessed Saviour, to deliver me; imploring, that thou wilt be pleased to endue me with the same blessed spirit of eternal truth, by whom thy holy word was dictated to thy disciples; that, by the assistance of that spirit in reading, I may understand thy word; and, by understanding, may evermore delight in it, and conform my life entirely to its precepts.

XL. Most great and glorious God, who hast appointed the rivers to hasten with a rapid motion to the sea, be graciously pleased, I most humbly beseech thee, to make the stream of my will perpetually to flow with a cheerful and impetuous course, bearing down pleasure, interest, afflictions, death, and all other obstacles and impediments whatsoever, before it, till it plunge itself joyfully

into the unfathomable ocean of thy divine will, for the sake of thy beloved son, my Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen !

XLI. This may be laid down as a general maxim, that whosoever is not sincere to man, can never be sincere to God ; nor can he that is insincere to God, be ever sincere to man : for without sincerity there can be no virtue, either moral or divine.

XLII. The original and progress of virtue seems to me to be this : God, in the first place, gives grace to man, which grace produces faith, faith wisdom, and wisdom virtue. Grace enlightens the soul, and makes the objects of faith visible to it ; faith having the prospect of felicity in view, necessarily begets wisdom, or a most earnest desire, and most prudent prosecution, of that felicity ; the consequence of which is virtue, or a suitable conduct of our lives, for the attainment of the same end. But there is another sort of faith, of a wretched kind, which may arise in the soul of vicious men, at the approach of death. For, the deluding scene of the pleasures and vanities of this world being withdrawn, a new and real world will discover itself to them ; they must then have faith ; their eyes can no longer then be kept shut ; they must then be convinced, that there is a God, from whose glorious presence they must for ever be excluded ; a heaven never to be enjoyed, and a hell not to be avoided. As to the mercies of God to sinners, I desire to have as enlarged notions of

them, as may be consistent with reason ; having abundant need of them, and humbly imploring them for my own salvation. I make no doubt, that repentance and conversion may be, and sometimes are, wrought by God Almighty, in a moment ; and, he that sees its sincerity, may, without further proof, be pleased to accept it. But it is an intolerable presumption, for any one to expect, and depend upon, such a favour ; besides, that he who has this sudden and late sincerity, cannot have the satisfaction of knowing it himself, having no time to make any convincing trial of it ; but must lie under extraordinary doubts, whether it be real or not, whether it be the effect of grace, or only the effect of fear. At best, it is infinitely hazardous ; and the case is of such prodigious consequence, that a wise man, if possible, would run no hazard at all.

XLIII. Avarice can overcome pleasure, and constrain the covetous man to abandon it all the days of his life, for no other end than to heap up an useless treasure. And, were it not a shame, should vice have power to do, what virtue cannot perform ? Shall not our love and duty to the adorable God, so much as oblige us to exchange an inconsiderable pleasure, for a vastly great one ? A pleasure, which, like a flower, is no sooner blown than it fades, for a joy, which, beginning to take root, and blossom here, will flourish and bear delicious fruit to all eternity ?

XLIV. It is necessary to be wise, in order to love

wisdom ; to be good, that we may love mercy ; and, to be charitable, that we may love bounty : for, if these things be wanting in us, how can we love God, and adore him as we ought to do, for those lovely attributes ? On the contrary, it is as necessary to be temperate, that we may hate intemperance ; to be just, that we may hate injustice ; to be humble, that we may hate pride ; otherwise how can we hate vice, which is so odious to God ?

XLV. My most gracious God, who hast been infinitely merciful to me and my dear child, not only in the year past, but through all the years of our life, be pleased to accept my most unfeigned thanks, for thy innumerable blessings to us ; graciously pardoning the manifold sins and infirmities of my life past, and bountifully bestowing, both upon my dear child and myself, all those graces and virtues which may render us acceptable to thee. And every year which thou shalt be pleased to add to our lives, add also, I most humbly implore thee, more strength to our faith, more ardour to our love, and a greater perfection to our obedience ; and grant, that, in an humble sincerity, and constant perseverance, we may serve thee most faithfully the remainder of our lives, for Jesus Christ his sake, thy blessed Son, our merciful Redeemer. Amen.

XLVI. Reason must be careful to keep all the affections of the soul, as a skilful general does his soldiers, under a constant exercise and strict discipline. For too much rest and liberty will make

them grow licentious and mutinous: and, when they have once learned to be disobedient, it will be a difficult task to reduce them again under good command.

XLVII. How happy is the soul, to whom virtue and vice are the only objects of its desires and aversions. Which loves nothing but what it is sure to obtain, and dreads nothing but what it is certain to avoid. Which rests upon a rock whose foundation is immoveable, and leans upon a support that can never deceive it. Which securely reposes itself, upon the great and gracious God. And, unlading itself of all its cares, lays them upon Him, who so tenderly cares for us, and loves us, with a dearer and much better love, than we are able to feel for ourselves.

XLVIII. If we do not believe God Almighty to be infinitely wiser than ourselves, why do we worship him? If we do, why do we not, with a happy assurance, commit ourselves, and all that belongs to us, entirely to his will and disposal?

XLIX. Lively and elevated ideas of God, and of eternal life, must necessarily create in us most despicable and contemptible notions of this life and world. For it is a notorious contradiction to say, that our love to God is hearty and sincere, and yet, at the same time, that we feel in ourselves a great and earnest love of the world. It is a natural effect of love, to create an ardent desire to enjoy the company and presence of that which is beloved. But vehemently to love this life and this world, is

to desire to be as far distant, and as long absent, as possible, from God, whom we pretend to be the object of our love.

L. I am convinced, that the pleasure of virtue has been, and ever will be, a riddle in the world, as long as it lasts. The meaning of it has never been, nor ever can be, known or conceived, but by those to whom it shall please God, out of his infinite goodness, to expound it.

LI. Faith is the blessed tree, which produces the noble and divine fruits of wisdom, virtue, and true felicity. But it is of so fine and delicate a nature, that it will not grow and thrive in the cold and barren soil of man's heart, without his incessant care and industry, and the enlivening influence of the divine Spirit. O gracious God, so cherish and increase, I most humbly beseech thee, that small grain of it, which thou hast been pleased to plant in my heart, that it may spread and flourish, and take such firm root there, as to be able to defend itself, and protect me, under the secure shelter of its branches, from all storms and tempests that shall ever assault either, in life or death !

LII. Man must consider his being in one of these two capacities; either as liable to an utter dissolution by death, or as capable of an eternal continuance after death, in happiness, or in misery. If he believe the former, why does he ever disturb his mind, with the doubtful thoughts of a God? If he believe the latter, why does he unprofitably entertain his mind, with any thing else?

LIII. My most good and bountiful God, what numberless praises have I to give thee, and pardons to beg of thee, both arising from the employment about which I have been, for some months past. What thanks have I to return thee, for the ease, the conveniences, and comforts of life, which thou hast so abundantly bestowed upon me! But, O my gracious Lord! what fervent addresses ought I to make to thy infinite mercy, to forgive my ingratitude and weakness, in suffering my thoughts to wander from thee, and my affections to grow languid towards thee! How much time have I been impertinently consuming, in building a house, which I ought to have employed, in endeavouring to form my mind to a perfect obedience to thee! * Pardon, great God! I beseech thee for Jesus Christ's sake, all my omissions and neglects, and my too often cold and distracted addresses to thee; and grant, that I may pass the rest of my life, in an uninterrupted endeavour to please thee, and in a continual return of thanks for this, and for all those innumerable blessings, which thou art never ceasing to bestow upon so undeserving a wretch.

LIV. Assurance of eternal happiness, that sublimest degree, that finishing stroke, of human felicity in this life, is that, which every soul pants after, which makes any serious reflections in matters of religion. It is, therefore, necessary to know, upon what foundation this blessed state is built, and from what principles it arises. And those, I

* See Sections lix. lxvi. lxxx. — Ed.

think, it is plainly evident, are faith, love, and obedience: since no man can have assurance, that does not feel in himself the principle of obedience; nor can he have obedience, without the principle of love; nor love, without the principle of faith. For it is a notorious contradiction, to imagine, that any one can be assured of God Almighty's pardon, without obeying Him; of his favour, without loving Him; or of the eternal enjoyment of his goodness, without a firm and stedfast belief in Him. But I am persuaded, that the word *faith* is too frequently misunderstood, and taken for a bare, careless, and faint assent, to any truth we pretend to believe; which notion, is not only deceitful and false, but pernicious and destructive. This, therefore, is what I mean by a firm belief in God; when, from intent meditation and mature reflection, the judgment, reason, understanding, and all the faculties of the soul, are overpowered with an irresistible conviction of the necessary existence of such a Divine Being; who is also represented to the mind, as infinite in glory, in power, in wisdom, in goodness, and in all perfection; with such charms, such beauty, such loveliness, as to captivate and ravish the affections of the soul, and smite it with a divine love. Such a love, as may possess it with an ardent desire after the enjoyment of him, with diligent endeavours to please him, and with incessant strivings to resemble him, and render itself amiable and acceptable to him. Such a love, as may reign triumphantly in the soul, engrossing all

its affections, divesting all other objects of their charms, nay, making them appear vile and contemptible; and delivering up the absolute and entire dominion of the soul, to its great and glorious Creator. Accept, great God, of such an entire dominion over my soul, and be pleased to maintain it against all opposition and temptation whatsoever, by thy infinite power, evermore!

LV. The next thing necessary to be seriously and impartially considered relating to faith, is what measures and degrees of it we have. For, since our eternal happiness depends upon our being possessed of this virtue, we cannot make too nice and diligent inquiries, what proportion of it we feel in ourselves. And to that end, we are to consider, whether there be any thing that we fear, or love, more than God; whether his favour be the centre, to which all our aims, designs, and desires tend; whether his displeasure is the evil, which we most carefully and solicitously strive to avoid; whether our chief study be, to know his divine will, and our constant labour, or rather delight, to perform it; whether any temptation, either of pleasure or gain, be capable of moving us to do an ill action; or whether the fear of any loss or mischief, either to our persons or estates, be capable of deterring us from perseverance in good ones: for, if we value estate, reputation, or life, more than we hate sin and vice, and would be induced to commit the latter, to save any of the former, it is demonstrable, that we fear the loss of those things, more than we

fear God. And, if we find ourselves capable of being tempted and allured, either by pleasure or profit, to do an unjust or vicious action, it is as plain, that we love those things more than we love Him; and that the consideration of His favour and displeasure prevails upon us, then only, when nothing else comes in competition with them. But, if we find that we reject many things, which otherwise we should chuse; that we despise many things, which otherwise we should value; that we refrain from many actions, which otherwise we should have committed; and do many others, which else we should have avoided; and all this, only in regard to the favour or displeasure of God, — it is evident, that we are actuated by the influence of a true and vigorous faith. Which grant, most gracious God, to me thy poor unworthy servant, in the most perfect manner of which my frail nature is capable; pardoning in me all the defects of it hitherto, for Jesus Christ's sake!

LVI. Duty and happiness are so closely linked together, that the performance of the one, naturally draws the other after it. For, as it is our duty gratefully to adore the great God for all his blessings, and contentedly to submit to all his dispensations; so it is a pleasure to be grateful and contented: but he that is discontented, can never be grateful; nor he that is contented, miserable. Blessed be the most bountiful God, who has annexed an unspeakable pleasure to faith and virtue; who has, in his infinite goodness, made those things

that are of the highest advantage to mankind, so exceedingly delightful!

LVII. Such is the weakness and imperfection of bare human nature, supported only by its own force, that it is capable of conducting us but rarely to truth; though it frequently leads us to innumerable errors. A remarkable instance of this, is the opinion of that learned and great philosopher Aristotle, that the world and race of man were eternal; than which, nothing was more injudiciously imagined; nor was there ever a greater contradiction advanced, nor more repugnant to common sense. The falsity of the notion plainly appears from this consideration, without recurring to revelation to confute it: if there were an eternal succession of men, we must, in our thoughts, trace this eternity up from one man to another, till we arrive at that man who was the first possessor of it; since it is plain, from the nature of succession, that there must have been a first; and whosoever that first was, who was the possessor of eternal life, we must necessarily conceive to be likewise possessed of eternal power; and, being eternal without beginning, he must infallibly continue eternal without end; which naturally leads us to the conception of a being vastly different from man. So that this wild incoherent notion of the eternity of mankind, shows us plainly how glimmering a light the clearest human reason gives, and how much we stand in need of brighter illuminations. But, though life in man has so short a period, we cannot but con-

ceive it to be somewhere eternal. For, if we could possibly imagine a time when no being had life, it is, I think, impossible to conceive how any being could ever have begun to live. For it is evident, that life having annexed to it a measure of power, must, consequently, be the work and product of power. And, in supposing a time when there was no such thing as life, we suppose a time when there was no such thing as power, since there can be no power without life. And, consequently, it were impossible that life could have had any where a beginning: from whence it follows, that life, in some one being, is eternal, and, from that inexhaustible fountain, has been conveyed and bestowed to all creatures that have ever possessed it. And that eternal fountain of life is God: who is, also, the sole fountain of wisdom, of power, of happiness, and of all goodness; and who, out of his infinite bounty, dispenses, to all his creatures, such proportions of these several blessings as he thinks fit; each of them being totally and entirely comprehended in his own blessed being; whom my soul most humbly adores, and to whom it desires faithfully to render all honour, praise, and dutiful obedience, evermore.

LVIII. Man is of such a base and perverse disposition, that he is seldom prevailed upon by mildness and goodness; but is restive and obstinate, like an untamed horse, contending against the fixed methods of God's providence in the world. His mind seldom submits to reason, but must be

mastered and broken by rough usage and affliction, till he is sensible of his own weakness, and inability to contend against almighty power. Were man's reason more strong, or his pride less powerful, he would never be pushed on to so dangerous an experiment.

LIX. There is no less necessity of the mind's being fixed and steady, in order to its right direction to the subject of its consideration, than of the hand's being firm and unshaken, that it may surely hit the mark at which it aims. For, when the mind is pointing at a subject, if it has not firmness enough to keep itself fixed upon it, every light thought or imagination is capable of pushing it beside the mark, and making it lose its aim. And, being thus unstable and uncertain, it is like a weak bird in a strong tempest, that has neither force nor weight sufficient to keep a direct course, but is carried by the violence of the storm, beside the place where it endeavours to settle. In this condition is the mind, when capable of being hurried from the subject of its contemplation, by every gust of passion. And, though it has reason in view, it wants force to bear up to it, and ballast sufficient to resist the fierce assaults of its unruly affections, which keep it in a continual wavering course, and hinder it from arriving at security and repose. The greatest concern, therefore, which a man has, is to labour to gain such a steadiness of mind, such a method of reasonable thinking, as may not be capable of any interruption. And, when this is

obtained, the next care must be, with the utmost diligence, to preserve the mind in this happy state. And, to this end, we must not be less watchful over innocent, than over vicious recreations ; and must take care that an undue eagerness in the one, does not amuse and lead us insensibly to the other. For, the thoughts being once unfixed, it is not so easy a matter to settle them again ; and the affections being by degrees disengaged from their true and proper objects, will be in danger of betaking themselves to false and trifling ones : nay, it is well, being once upon the wing, if they stop on this side folly and vice ; the first step towards each of which, is a coolness and indifference to wisdom and virtue. Now, such a case is not the less deplorable, because innocent diversions were its occasion : and, indeed, I doubt no diversions can properly be called innocent, which have that fatal effect. Besides, by disuse, the mind, as well as the body, contracts sluggishness and impotence : so that, when it is brought to exercise, and we endeavour to turn it to reasonable thoughts, it appears, that it has not only lost its vigour, but its pleasure also ; since the pleasure of wisdom and virtue, which are the result of right reason, depends upon the vigorous impressions made by them upon the mind. So that, it is impossible that a languid soul can ever be a happy one, any more than a wavering soul, doubtfully hovering between virtue and vice. I am but too sensible, how ill an effect idle and impertinent cares and amusements, though very innocent

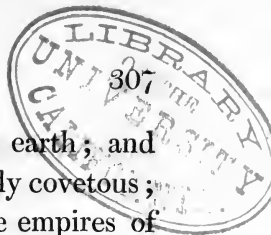
ones, by some continuance, and frequent repetitions, have upon the mind. I had hopes, when I began to build my house, that I was pretty well prepared against this danger; being very well aware of it, and, as carefully as I could, endeavouring to prevent it. But I found, to my great dissatisfaction and trouble, that those necessary cares and contrivances with which I was obliged to fill my head, were so great a prejudice and incumbrance to my mind, that I had neither liberty nor power, however zealous my efforts, to penetrate far into those thoughts and reasonings, which I passionately desired, and after which I often earnestly laboured; thoughts and reasonings, of which I would rather be continually master, than of all the houses and kingdoms upon earth. My soul was clogged, and grown too heavy to soar above the reach of low insipid conceptions; its springs seemed relaxed, and incapable of pushing it to vigorous imaginations; all its bright ideas were clouded; it grieved and languished, to think from whence it was fallen; and it dreaded the misery of sinking yet lower. It mourned and was ashamed, to stoop to those fairy delusions, those shadows of pleasures, which the world affords, and which it could not forbear to despise; though it had not force to reach its wonted joys, by bearing itself up to lively meditations, full of love and adoration to its great Creator. By this, my ever gracious God, thou hast taught me, that thou being the only fountain of true joy and felicity, every step I ad-

vance towards thee, the nearer I approach my happiness; and every degree I depart from thee, the more I hasten towards my misery. O be thou mercifully pleased to guard and protect my faith, that neither the open force of the most violent temptations may be able to shake it, nor the insinuating allurements of innocent diversions,* by gentle unsuspected impressions, to undermine it; but keep me, perpetually and firmly adhering to thee, constantly persevering, to the last moments of my life, in all those things which are pleasing and acceptable in thy sight, for Jesus Christ's sake, my ever blessed Redeemer :

A peaceful life all other ways you'll miss ;
Through virtue lies the only path to bliss !

LX. The first two things to be sought after, in order to the acquiring of a settled calmness and undisturbed pleasure of mind, are a constant and fervent love of the adorable God, and a real and entire contempt of the world. Now, the love of God, will certainly flow from a frequent and serious contemplation of his continual and unspeakable goodness; as the contempt of the world, will undoubtedly ensue from a reasonable and impartial consideration of its worthlessness. These I look upon as the necessary foundation, upon which alone may be built that noble, beautiful, and desirable structure of an intrepid, virtuous, and peaceful

* It was a favourite saying of the great Sir Matthew Hale, that '*perimus licitis*;' — 'We perish [by the abuse of] things allowable.' — ED.



mind: the only valuable treasure upon earth; and that alone, of which we may be innocently covetous; a dominion more glorious, than all the empires of the world; in the pursuit after which alone, ambition is justifiable. O my God, possess my soul with such an ardent love of thee, so buoyant above all my other affections, that no one may ever come in competition with it; such a love, as may not only subdue all other affections, but purify and make them innocent; such a love, as may create in my soul a perpetual pleasure in the contemplation of Thee, and a continual thirst after Thee, never to be quenched, but, by the fulness of enjoyment; a love, which may transport my soul with thy divine perfections, and paint there such lively images, such bright ideas of thy glorious Majesty, that none of the trifling pleasures and temptations of this world, may be able to make on it the least impression. And as, my gracious Lord, thou hast given me much, and forgiven me much, so raise my love to a degree proportionable to thy bounty and mercy!*

LXI. Death is said to be the king of terrors. These words I suppose are usually misunderstood; they are not, in Scripture, meant of a natural death, as it is only the separation of soul and body; but must be understood of damnation, that eternal death, which is, most properly, though not emphatically

* ‘Semel ergo, breve præceptum tibi præcipitur; DILIGE, ET QUOD VIS FAC. Radix sit intus dilectionis, non potest de ista radice nisi bonum existerè.’—*S. August.* tom. iii. p. 875.—ED.

enough, if words were to be found to heighten the expression, termed the king of terrors; as being the eternal separation of the soul from God, its everlasting exclusion from any portion of felicity. And I think it is evident, it ought to be taken in this sense: for a man who has either led a virtuous or innocent life, or, who having done otherwise, truly and sincerely repents, resolving upon a perfect and universal obedience to his God for the future; who is conscious to himself of no wilful breach of his resolution, but continually begs pardon for such failings and infirmities, as he cannot either discover or avoid; who unfeignedly abhors those follies and vanities, which he fancied so much pleasure in before, placing his greatest delight, in love and obedience to God; who looks upon his being, as made for another world, not for this; and who can, with the piercing eye of faith, cast frequent, though imperfect glances thither, and make such discoveries of the glories of heaven, as to inflame his soul, with an earnest desire to enjoy them,—such a one must needs behold death, with a wishing eye; it will appear to him no otherwise, than as that which opens the door to his liberty and happiness, and lets him into those joys, for which he has so greatly longed: he would behold death approaching, with the same pleasure, that a man cast upon a desert island, would see a ship sailing to his relief; he would run eagerly to the shore, and embark with delight.

LXII. It is not amiss, in the matter of benefits received, to consider how easily and almost na-

turally, the love of corrupt, ungrateful man passes from the giver to the gift, and, only glancing upon the former, fixes itself on the latter. And this being remarkably notorious, in the case of benefits received from Almighty God, it concerns us to consider well what we receive, and how much we pay; that we may know whether our payments in love, duty, and adoration, bear any tolerable proportion to what we owe, and what we have received, in real benefits; whether our love to God be pure and sincere, or only mercenary and interested; whether it flows from those infinite perfections that render him truly amiable, or proceeds only from our value for the things which he bestows. If the last be the case, then, to speak plainly, we must confess, that we love God a little, because he gives us those things which we love a great deal; and, I doubt, it may too often be added, much better than himself. For, if our love of Him be grounded upon our love for the things which he gives us, it is demonstrable, that we loved those things not only before, but better than him; and that our love to him was kindled, not by his own excellence, but by the excellence we fancied in his gifts. Now, if those things have no intrinsic value in them, nor have any just title to our affection, and yet rob God of it, to whom it so justly belongs; I fear, such a love can hardly be cleared from being in some measure idolatrous. But there are gifts that have a real value in themselves, such as faith, wisdom, virtue, &c.; the love

of these will increase our love to God: in these, we need not fear loving the gift, more than the giver, since it is by the love of these excellences only, that we can arrive at the love of God; for faith gives us true notions and apprehensions of him; wisdom leads us to the knowledge of him; and virtue to the obedience of him. And the same may be shown from every other grace or virtue. In loving truth, justice, bounty, &c., we actually love God: for these virtues are a part of his essence, and inseparable from it; not belonging properly to any other, but exclusively his own; no portion or degree of any of them reside in any other being, otherwise than by a gracious communication of them by God, from their several originals remaining entire and complete in himself. From whom, I humbly beg continual supplies, and increase, of all graces and virtues, through his infinite bounty and compassion.

LXIII. Pleasure results from an impetuous motion of the united affections, in the prosecution, expectation, or enjoyment of some good; or, at least, of what we take to be such. But, even in sensual pleasures, it is more in the expectation, than in the enjoyment. For the share which the body has in pleasure, is very inconsiderable; the much greater part, either of pleasure or pain, being lodged in the mind, and felt there; though the body is capable of a greater, and more lasting perception of pain, than it is of pleasure. Now, to be sensible of this truth, we have but to consider some one of

the most sensual pleasures, that of gluttony for instance; and it is the same, of all the rest. This, at first, may appear to be entirely the enjoyment of the body, though that bears a very small share in it; for it lasts no longer, than the meat is going down, and tasted upon the palate. The chief of this pleasure, is in the fancy and imagination; in the earnest longings after it, and expectation of it, before it is really tasted: so that the participation of any sensual pleasure, is, properly, rather the cessation of pleasure, than the enjoyment of it; since enjoyment extinguishes that principal part of pleasure, which was tasted in the mind, by the help of fancy and imagination.

LXIV. A great part of wisdom consists in knowing how to make a right estimate of things. For our affection and aversion always attend upon our esteem and disesteem; and if these be built upon a false foundation, the affection and aversion will be fixed upon wrong objects. So that, we shall either love what we ought to hate, and hate what we ought to love; or, at least, our love and hatred will exceed their due bounds, with respect to the value of the different objects upon which they are placed. Happiness and misery are things, the one of which is most earnestly coveted, the other most carefully avoided, by all mankind. But how can a man, with any judgment, set himself to procure happiness, and escape misery, unless he has first the knowledge of those good and evil things, which conduce severally to them: for we

must call every thing good, that contributes to our happiness, and every thing evil, that procures our misery. Ignorance and mistake are fatal, in the choice of good and evil : wherefore, it behoves every man to be able to discern between the one and the other, no less than it behoves a physician to distinguish wholesome herbs from poisonous plants ; lest, where he designs a remedy, he should administer destruction. If men are ignorant, what are the ingredients that enter into the composition of happiness and misery, or if they are mistaken in the choice of those ingredients, they will be wretched enough to chuse the contrary of what they seek after. Is it reasonable to imagine, that care and skill are necessary for the acquisition of every trifle upon which we ignorantly set a value, as riches, and honour, and all those sciences, by the means of which, we hope to reach any of these attainments ; and yet, that true and substantial happiness, which is the perfection of our being, comes by chance, without being sought after ? Can man be vain enough to imagine, that the mind can be furnished with just and true notions, without ever taking the pains to think ; with lofty and generous conceptions, without giving itself the trouble to meditate and reflect ? That it can, to the utmost of its power, fathom the depths of the knowledge of God and itself, without an unwearied diligence and constant application ? And, finally, that, having by such means, ascended to a high degree of felicity, it can be able to maintain its station, without industry and assiduity ?

LXV. We are not only miserable enough, to be governed by our passions, but foolish enough, to repine and murmur, that God Almighty will not submit to be governed by them too. This is the cause of our so frequent quarrels at his pleasure, in ordering and disposing the affairs of the world ; and of our uneasiness, in vainly contending with his unchangeable decrees, which are unchangeable therefore only, because they are the result of His infinite unerring wisdom ; all whose determinations, as they are best in themselves, so, doubtless, are they the most beneficial to his poor creatures. What we want is, simply confidence enough to rely entirely on His mercy ; this is the one ground of reliance, which will never disappoint us.

LXVI. How many irretrievable inconveniences do men fall into, purely from the fickleness and continual mutability of their dispositions. It were good, therefore, thoroughly to understand ourselves, in order to prevent the miseries accruing from this cause. We think, perhaps, this instant, that such a thing would please us, and make us happy ; accordingly we apply our utmost diligence, sparing no pains to procure it : and it is ten to one, by that time we have it, our humour is altered, our labour lost, and all our expectations of happiness frustrated. Then our inconstant fancy pitches upon some other object, persuading us it is that which will give us content ; this also obtained, from the same cause, disappoints us as much as the former ; and not pleasing us, the consequence is,

that we grow weary, and disgusted ; and it is well, if we have it in our power conveniently to get rid of it, when we think fit : for a thousand instances may be given, of cases where a mistake in the satisfaction which we propose to ourselves, proves vastly prejudicial, and often causes the misery of our whole lives. How frequently are young people ruined, and elder ones unfortunate, upon this very account ? Imagining, that the warmth of their present temper will continue, and procure them satisfaction, in despite of all the inconveniences which may attend its gratification ; but that eagerness unexpectedly relaxes, they are left in the lurch, defrauded of their happiness, and loaded with vexation. Thus, unhappy man turns restlessly from one thing to another, hoping by change to find relief ; and never reflects, that the desire of change is his disease ; that his disquiets will never cease, till he has unalterably fixed upon the objects of his pleasure ; and till, having brought his mind to like and love only what is fit and reasonable, he keeps it firm and constant in the approbation of these things. When the vagrancy of humour and fancy is settled, a man has but to chuse, for once, his pleasures, and, so far as the nature of human things will permit, he is assured to have them permanent. I myself was in great danger of making a scurvy experiment, of what I have been saying ; and had not my mind, by my ever good God's assistance, taken a pretty strong bent beforehand, towards the satisfaction which I had previously

fixed upon, it would have run the hazard of declining from it; for the ideas which it had conceived, began to wear away, for want of renewing the impressions, by intent meditation and frequent reasonings; and from these, I was in a great measure precluded, by an incessant hurry, for six or seven months together, of trivial employments, in conversing with workmen, and contriving for building. Thence, I found it no easy matter, to bring my mind up to its former station; and it considerably lost ground, notwithstanding my continual endeavours to keep it immoveable in those principles, in which I had resolved to persevere, to my life's end: for though, I thank God, I found no inclination to be vicious, yet the ardour of my virtue, and consequently the pleasure I received from it, were extremely abated. And, though I still retained an abhorrence to vice, yet my indignation at it, was much slackened: so that, virtue did not seem to have altogether so charming, nor vice so deformed, an aspect, as they used formerly to appear in: and the passions, which I hoped had been pretty well overcome, began to strive and struggle for mastery again. Now, had they prevailed, the house which I was building for a comfortable retreat from the world, where I designed to spend my days in the service and adoration of my most merciful God, and in studying to cultivate my mind, and to improve it in all virtue, and to render it less unworthy of his favour,—would have seemed to me a melancholy habitation. And, after all my charge and pains in building it, I

should have grown weary of a solitary life; for solitariness without virtue, is an unsupportable burthen. And I should probably have left my retreat, to have played the fool somewhere else. But, blessed be my gracious God, who has averted, and, I trust in his infinite mercy, ever will avert, from me, so fatal a mischief! Oh let me never stray from thee, nor shrink, in the least, from my resolutions of an entire obedience to thee. Hold thou me up, that I may never fall; and, in thy glorious light, let me evermore see light. Leave me not to my own vain imaginations, the greatest curse that can befall wretched man.

LXVII. As a reasonable, well-grounded faith is the highest perfection, and supreme felicity, of human nature, in this imperfect state, so, an unreasonable and obstinate belief, is most destructive in its consequences to salvation. He is as sure to miss the mark at which he aims, who over-shoots it, as he that shoots below it; and, perhaps, he is not less likely to fail of salvation, who over-believes, than he who believes too little, or does not believe at all; for, though it is absolutely necessary to believe, that Jesus Christ came into the world to be the Saviour of mankind, and that it is through his merits, propitiation, and intercession alone, that we can reasonably hope to be saved,—yet, if we think that he has so absolutely purchased salvation for us, as to disengage us from the obligation of our utmost obedience, and to release us from labouring and striving diligently, according to the utmost extent of our power, to serve and please

the great God, to imitate his perfections, to exterminate, as far as possible, all sin and impurity out of our souls, and to be always renewing in them the almost worn-out traces of his glorious image, — he that has such an unreasonable, preposterous faith, I doubt, will find himself as much wide of the mark in the affair of his salvation, as he that believes nothing relating to it. Such an unlimited mercy were rather to render us libertines *, than make us free ; it were to suppose, that the infinitely pure God, had purchased and given a liberty, to those whom he was pleased to love and favour, of being as impure and vicious as they thought fit ; which is the most notorious contradiction imaginable ; since no reasonable man can conceive, that a being of an essence perfectly pure, can delight in perverse, polluted creatures, of a nature entirely opposite to his own. Yet, after all, we must not pretend a title to the favour of God, from any virtue or purity of which we are capable ; but, having, to the utmost we are able, performed our duty, we must cast ourselves wholly upon his mercy, through the merits and intercession of Jesus Christ our Saviour. For, it were a rash presumption to think, that such a creature as man is, were capable of doing or being any thing, that could merit from the Deity ; who bestows all things upon his indigent creatures, but who neither needs, nor can receive, any thing from them ; who accepts, indeed, our most imperfect praises and adoration,

* Mr. How cannot here be defended, from a sort of classical *pun.* — ED.

not flowing from ourselves, but from the influence and inspiration of his blessed Spirit in us, who is the Author of all our virtue, and by whose power alone it is, that we are able to forego any vice. How, then, can frail man merit aught of his Creator, who has nothing of his own to bestow upon Him? Who, with all his pride and arrogance, is likewise so impotent, as not to be able to give himself the life of the poorest insect, nor so much as to retain his expiring breath one moment; how much less, then, has he power to assume and lead a virtuous life? such a life, as makes some approaches toward that of angels; which nevertheless, not being the result of man's wisdom or ability, can claim no title to merit? If the seed sown, produce a pleasant harvest, it is to the sower the praise belongs. And whatsoever virtues, from the divine influence, spring up in the soul, to the bountiful God alone the honour is due.

LXVIII. Neither vicious nor innocent pleasures, which are communicated by the bodily senses, can ever give satisfaction to a rational man; who, by a clearer reason, discovering their vanity and insufficiency, will not unprofitably waste his desires and affections upon them. But the pleasures of virtue, which are conveyed to the mind by thought and reflection, come attended with a delightful force, which convinces the reason of every wise man: so that his soul may freely, without check or restraint, devote itself to their enjoyment.

LXIX. Though it is impossible to describe all the delusions which wild passions impose upon man-

kind, the two following may justly be reckoned amongst the greatest; and are, indeed, the pillars upon which error, vice, and ignorance, are erected, and by which they are supported. The first is, man's conceptions of eternity are slight and superficial: he is, as though he had neither share nor concern in it; his imagination is filled and loaded with the enjoyments of time, as though it were his own unalterable and unalienable possession. The second, and no less mischievous delusion, is, that man's thoughts and notions of the Deity, are low, mean, and unworthy of that most glorious Being: while his mind is fraught with great and lofty ideas of his own sufficiency and excellence, very unsuitable to so impotent and helpless a creature. Were these two gross mistakes rectified, man would soon grow better acquainted with himself; would lead a life becoming a reasonable creature; and would have a more true and intimate knowledge of God, in comparison with which, all the things we see, or can conceive, are of no value.

LXX. This day* puts me in mind of the great perplexity and uneasiness which I have perceived in many people, occasioned by the superstitious impressions made upon their minds, by the tales of weak and ignorant people in their infancy. A period, when the tender mind is most apt to receive the impressions of error and vice, as well as those of truth and virtue; and, having once received either the one or the other, is likely to retain them, as

* Childermas-day.

long as it subsists in the body. How charitable a care is it, therefore, and how much the duty of every parent whom it has pleased God to bless with a right understanding, to endeavour to transmit that understanding, with what improvement he can, to his children? To have, at least, as much care of them, as a gardener has of a nice delicate plant that he values; when he diligently shelters and defends it, from the pernicious assaults of storms and tempests, and blasting winds, till a milder season and warmer sun put it out of danger? With no less industry, ought a kind parent to guard the tender mind of his child, from the hurtful notions, and superstitious conceits, of foolish, ignorant people; who, by senseless, impertinent tales, begin to plant errors and vice in the innocent soul, even from the cradle. It is in the nursery, where ignorantly deluded, and deluding wretches, first sow those tares in the child, which it is ten to one whether the grown-up man is afterwards ever able to root out. There, every simple creature, if not prevented, will be blotting the yet clear and unspotted soul, and sullyng it with false lines, and foul characters; besmearing it, after their awkward manner, with horrid images of frightful sprites and hobgoblins, and painting upon it a thousand monstrous and terrific shapes of death, to make their future life miserably wretched. Thus, with a barbarous folly, they create, betimes, the most abhorring aversion in the mind, to that which Providence has ordained; and, with a detestable impiety, sow in it

the seeds of reluctance and contradiction to the wisdom, will, and unalterable decrees of the Almighty. So that, when wiser people come to try their skill, they find their unhappy soul so bedaubed with those odious, hideous figures, that there is little room left for fairer and better impressions. Here is laid the groundwork of an erroneous judgment, and wrong understanding; and, amongst other mischiefs that have here their beginning, are those very grievous ones, of a timorous and superstitious spirit, apt to give credit to the luckiness or unluckiness of certain days, and to a thousand ominous whimsies and conceits; which, as they are the unhappy offspring of weakness and ignorance, so are they the never enough to be detested parents of grief and misery, to those who are weak and wretched enough to be deluded by them. All these deplorable follies proceed from wrong and unworthy apprehensions of God's providence, in his care of man, and government of the world. For no reasonable creature can ever imagine, that the all-wise God should inspire owls and ravens to hoot out the elegies of dying men; that he should have ordained a fatality in number, and inflicted punishment without an offence; and that, the being one amongst the fatal number at a table, should, though contrary to no command, be a crime not to be expiated, but by death! That even spiders and candles should have a foreknowledge of man's destiny; that certain days are unlucky, as if the good and virtuous were not, at all times, in all

places, and in all numbers too, assured of the protection of the infinitely merciful God. These are such horrid conceits, so void of reason, and so full of impious folly, that those people can neither have right notions of him, nor trust, nor faith in him, that give credit to them. I might have added amongst the nursery-accomplishments, that the passions are generally nourished there, as carefully as the child; and it is well, if the indulgent mother, as well as others in the family that should have more wit, do not think pride and ambition admirable ingredients in a genteel and virtuous education. Thus folly, like gunpowder, runs in a train from one generation to another, preserved and conveyed by the perpetual tradition of tattling gossips.

LXXI. Though, as I have formerly said, man, who has no goodness or virtue originally in his own power, can merit nothing from that Being to whom all power belongs, yet he ought so to live, and so to act, as if the highest pitch of human virtue were scarcely, or, at most, but just sufficient, to procure the eternal favour of God; the consequence of which, to those on whom it is bestowed, is no less than eternal felicity.

LXXII. The affections of the soul of man, being encumbered with as many distractions as there are objects to excite and engage them, what measure of proportion, Oh most gracious God, can the gratitude of so frail and imperfect a creature, bear to the obligations ever flowing upon him from thy

unlimited bounty ! If every moment of time comes from thee loaded with blessings, what an unaccountable sum must the year produce ? And, if the blessings of a year surpass our account, how must we be confounded and lost, in the reckoning of our whole lives ? And should we, by the same method, most merciful God, strive to number our sins and offences, we should find it a task equally impossible, with that of numbering thy mercies : accept, therefore, I most humbly beseech thee, the imperfect thanks and adoration of my soul, and continually augment its power and capacity, more perfectly to render them both to Thee. Accept, likewise, of its unfeigned sorrow for all my sins and offences, and continually diminish in it the force of corruption, and all tendency and inclination to vice and disobedience. And, as thou renewest thy blessings with the year, to me and my dear child, so I beg thou wilt be pleased to make us both clean hearts, and to renew also right spirits within us ; that we may most gratefully, obediently, and acceptably, serve thee all the days of our lives, for Jesus Christ's sake, our gracious Lord and Saviour.

LXXIII. Man's excessive love of the world, and want of love to the great Creator, is, I may affirm, the cause of nine parts in ten of the vexations and uneasinesses of this life. Nor must he depend, for a remedy, upon the force of his reason ; which, without assistance, is too weak to subdue the fierce and obstinate passions that it has to en-

counter. Now, the passions, though they suffer a small defeat, can immediately levy new recruits, and return to the attack with fresh vigour; while reason, having no such supplies, must needs at length be overcome. Those ever-multiplying hydra's heads are not to be lopped off, by so weak an arm; and it were but inconsiderate rashness to attempt the labour of a Hercules, without the strength of a Hercules. Nor can so difficult a work be successfully undertaken, otherwise than by the help of that divine irresistible power, which is communicated to man by faith; a power, sufficient to make him more than conqueror. But, of all the mistakes which men continually make, there are, perhaps, none more frequent, and, I am sure, none more dangerous, than those concerning faith; a treasure, with the possession of which, they are too apt to flatter themselves; though, when it is requisite to be employed, it were well, if they did not too often find themselves deceived. This one instance I think is sufficient to demonstrate this matter: no man will walk upon the brink of a precipice, where he is assured that every slip is attended with death; nay, few care to approach, even within a moderate distance, where they might stand secure enough; because their fear, in that case, always represents to them the danger much greater and nearer, than it really is. Now, if men believed the eternal displeasure of God to be as great a mischief as the precipice, they would undoubtedly dread it as much, and as carefully avoid it. But we see many men, who think

they have faith, or at least who would be thought to have it, not only walking continually upon the outwardmost borders of innocence, but frequently stumbling, and falling far within those of vice; without greatly concerning themselves, to prevent such slips for the future. Thus, in the case of temporal evil, it is evident, that the firm belief of the danger will not suffer men to approach it so remotely even, as where no danger is; but, in the case of spiritual evil, their want of faith leads them confidently, into situations where it is impossible for them to escape.* So much can fear, in base degenerate man, prevail beyond reason! So weak is reason, without the strength of faith! Oh, my gracious God, grant me that inestimable treasure, by which my life may be furnished with all virtues, that may render it pleasing in thy sight, for Jesus Christ's sake!

LXXIV. Fancy is a weather-cock, that turns with every blast of the opinion and applause, of the inconstant, unthinking world. Whatever point it stands at this moment, the next, perhaps, it shall be hurried to that which is directly opposite. And he that steers his life by this compass, will be sure to make a very uncertain and vexatious voyage.

* 'The point between lawful pleasures and vice, is like a boundary between two kingdoms at war with each other. It is, therefore, most prudent, weak and defenceless as we are, not to venture to the very edge of our own side, but leave some space between, lest an insidious enemy surprize and take us captive, unawares.' — *Dr. Townson's Works*, vol. ii. p. 223.
— ED.

Instead of ever arriving at the haven of tranquillity and enjoyment, he will be forced upon the rocks of delusion and disappointment, where he will be wretchedly entertained, with repentance and despair.

LXXV. Religion is a thing much talked of, but little understood; much pretended to, but very little practised; and the reason why it is so ill practised, is, because it is not better understood. Knowledge, therefore, must precede religion; since it is necessary to be wise, in order to be virtuous. It must be known to whom, and upon what account, duty is owing, otherwise it can never be rightly paid. It must therefore be considered, that God is the object of all religion, and that the soul is the subject wherein it exists and resides. From the soul it must proceed, and to God it must be directed; as to that Almighty Being, whose power alone could create a rational soul, and whose goodness only could move him to make it capable of an eternal felicity. This infinite bounty of God has laid a perpetual obligation upon the soul, to a constant love, obedience, and adoration of Him; and to an undoubting assurance, that the same power and goodness which created man, will, if he perseveres in the sincere performance of his duty, for ever preserve and protect him. The body, therefore, can have no other share in religion, than by its gestures to represent and discover the bent and inclination of the mind. Which representations, also, are but too often false and

treacherous, deluding those that behold them, into the opinion of a saint, but truly discovering a notorious hypocrite to God; who sees the vast distance between real intentions, and deceptive pretences. People are as much deceived themselves, as they deceive others, who think to use religion as they do their best clothes; only wearing it at church on a Sunday, to appear fine, and make a show, and, as soon as they come home again, laying it aside carefully, for fear of wearing it out: but religion is good for nothing, that is made of so slight a stuff as will not endure wearing; which ought, in truth, to be as constant a covering to the soul, as the skin is to the body; division, being the ruin of both. Nor must it be thought, that religion consists only in the bending of the knees, which is a fitting posture of humility, but in the fervent and humble adoration of the soul; nor in the lifting up of the hands and eyes, but in the warmth of the affection. Outward gestures and decent behaviour are things very fit and reasonable, being all that the body can pay; but inward sincerity alone, can render them both acceptable. Much less, does religion consist in dismal looks and sour faces; which only show, that it is very unpalatable to those who make them; and it seems to me, as if they were swallowing something that went grievously against their stomachs. It is likewise to be considered, that the frequency and fervency, not the length of prayer, give it acceptance; that one petition, from a well-disposed mind, rightly ad-

ressed to God, is more efficacious, than ten sermons carelessly heard, and more carelessly practised. But hearing being much an easier duty than praying, because it can often change into sleeping, is therefore so much preferred to it by a great many people : but if, in the end, their profound ignorance will not excuse them, I am sure their stupid obstinacy never will. But, in order to praying rightly, so many virtues are required, that people think, perhaps, it would take up too much time and pains to acquire them : and they are much in the right, if they think their prayers will be insignificant without virtue, and that an ill man can never pray well, and to purpose ; for the stream will always partake of the fountain : and, if the mind, which is the fountain of all our addresses to God, be vicious and impure, the prayers which proceed from it, must needs be sullied with the same pollutions. But, on the contrary, if the mind be once made virtuous, all that proceeds from it will be pleasing and accepted. And as to dejected looks, and a sorrowful countenance, they are nowise graceful in religion ; which is so far from being a melancholy thing, that it can never appear displeasing, or tiresome, to a mind where wisdom and virtue do not first seem troublesome ; for wisdom, instructing the soul to act reasonably, instructs it, likewise, to serve and obey God readily and cheerfully. And, to a wise man, that which appears reasonable, will always appear delightful ; and religion is that very same reason.

and wisdom, whose ways are ways of pleasantness, and all whose paths are peace.

LXXVI. The peace of God being what we often pray for, and earnestly desire, ought, so far as possible, to be understood, in order to be more earnestly coveted, and surely possessed. For that, in which it is said to pass all understanding, is the invaluable advantage and delight with which it is constantly attended; and not that it is so unintelligible a thing, as not possibly to be apprehended by us: since that, which, in a great degree, we are capable of feeling, we are, certainly, in some measure, capable of understanding. This blessing is prayed for, that we may have the unspeakable comfort of feeling it; and, indeed, there is no understanding it, but by feeling it. But, though we may comprehend enough of its value to make it infinitely desirable, yet the utmost extent of it, as far surpasses our understanding, as the blessings which precede and follow it; which are the favour of God, and the inconceivable bliss that accompanies the eternal enjoyment of Him. Therefore, I will never cease my endeavours to know as much, nor my petitions to thee, my gracious God, to make me feel as much, of this blessed peace of thine,—a peace which all the power, wealth, and glory of this world, can never give,—as thou, of thy infinitely tender mercy, shalt think fit to bestow upon me. It is natural that the word peace, should put us in mind of its contrary, war; since peace arises from the conclusion of war, and from the cessation of strife and combat: and that there

is a contest in the soul of man, between reason and passion, wisdom and folly, virtue and vice, is too evident to need proof. And it is as plain, that wheresoever there is strife and contention, there must be trouble and disorder: therefore, the agitated mind, must needs be perplexed and restless, so long as this intestine war continues, and till there be a complete victory gained on one side or other. If vice and passion absolutely prevail, the contest indeed will be at an end, but it will be a wretched termination; and such a peace only will ensue, as will suffer those outrageous enemies to tyrannize, without opposition or control; a peace fatal to the soul, debarring it from any future hopes of liberty or happiness. But, if it please the all-merciful, as well as all-powerful God, to succour man's weak reason and virtue, engaged in this doubtful and dangerous conflict, and so to illuminate the one, and strengthen the other, as to give them an entire victory,—then, he crowns the transported soul with his divine peace; the joy and comfort of which, as much surpass all expression, as its infinite benefit and blessing surpass all understanding; which peace, most gracious God, grant evermore, I beseech thee, to thy poor unworthy servant, for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.

LXXVII. Imperfection is an argument that there is such a thing as perfection; and the experience of so many things imperfect, plainly leads us to a certainty of others that are perfect. For, one contrary is an argument of another opposite to it, as cold of heat, darkness of light, death of life,

and so of innumerable others: the former, in all these cases, being the privation of the latter, and, therefore, an evident demonstration of them. The world were a prodigious heap of imperfection, if it could be conceived to be independent, and to bear no relation to any thing but itself; and man is the most unfinished and imperfect of all its animals; who seems to have a capacity, only of aiming at, and pretending to, power and wisdom, without any ability of attaining to either; whose greatest advantage is, from his own manifest insufficiency and imperfection, to raise to himself a most convincing argument of the union of all those virtues and perfections in the Deity, of which he himself possesses little more than confused notions and faint conceptions: and thus, from his own clouds and darkness, he may reason himself into an assurance of the existence of that blessed and unclouded light. Since man, therefore, finds in himself such a deficiency of power and wisdom, he must needs perceive how unfit and unable he is to be his own governor; being assaulted, from without, by unhappy accidents, which he cannot prevent, and from within, by vexations and perturbations of mind, which he is not able to redress; and, by consequence, he must be conscious, that his corrupted will and depraved affections have much less any title to be his rulers. Why, then, does he not betake himself to consider, what is the will and pleasure of that transcendent Being, whom superior power and excellence, by an unquestionable right, have constituted his lord and governor;

bending the utmost of his endeavours, and dedicating his whole life, to the fulfilment and performance of God's holy will? As, by thy grace and mercy, most merciful Creator, which, in all humility, I implore of thee, it is my full purpose and design to do.

LXXVIII. The great preference frequently given, to sermons above prayer, makes me desirous to consider that matter, in order to a true discovery, to which of them the preference is justly due, and what the real value of each of them is.

Sermons serve for these two purposes : to teach their duty, to those who are ignorant of it ; and to put those in mind of their duty, who are neglectful of it : showing the first sort, how to perform it ; and persuading the latter, effectually to put it in practice. In both which things, sermons contribute to salvation, no otherwise, than he who shows a traveller his right way, and advises him to keep in it, contributes to his reaching his journey's end. For, if the traveller shall rest satisfied, in the bare advice and instruction which he has received, and proceed no further, he is never likely to reach the place of his original designation ; since, it is not to be supposed, that he who directs him, is to carry him thither upon his back. It is just the same case, in hearing sermons. The minister's business is no more, than to teach us how to be saved ; our own piety and virtue must carry us to heaven. This is the use of sermons, and a very great and necessary use it is ; and yet a man may be damned, notwithstanding all the good instructions that enter in at

his ears, unless they make a right impression on his heart. But it cannot be imagined, that the same thing will serve for all purposes. The ear is made for one use, and the heart for another; the one is the conduit of instruction, the other the seat of wisdom. So the mouth is very useful, in receiving food for the body; but it is the stomach that must digest and prepare it for strength and nourishment. Thus, it sufficiently appears, what the use of sermons is.

The use of prayer is now to be considered. And first, it must be known, that the affections of the soul have something that corresponds and sympathizes with them in the body, by which they usually discover themselves; as grief in the soul, appears by the weeping of the eyes; and joy displays itself, in a gay and cheerful countenance. And so, in our several duties to God, according as the soul is affected, from the same causes, it will certainly make the same outward discoveries. If it be oppressed with trouble, or has a lively sense of its wants and imperfections, it will oblige the tongue to utter them; seeking redress in humble petitions. If it abounds with gratitude, the lips will not be able to refrain their thanks; nor to withhold their praises and adorations, when the soul is inflamed with love. Thus, prayer is the language of the soul, whereby it expresses its several conditions and affections to the Almighty God; between whom and it, by this means, a constant correspondence is held. By prayer, the soul explains and unfolds itself to God, and, by the virtue of prayer, draws down continual benefits and

blessings from heaven ; asking being made the condition of receiving. And it is a folly for any one to expect favours, that he will not take the pains to ask for.

And thus, the advantages, of those different, but necessary, duties are discovered. Sermons hold the light, for the direction of prayer : the former, being the instruments of instruction ; the latter, the instrument of salvation. Nay, I might add, that were all people as wise and as virtuous as they ought to be, and could continue so, there would be no need at all of sermons ; * since there would be no occasion for teaching or persuading ; the former relating only to the ignorant, and the latter to the obstinate and vicious. Inso-much, that, as folly, weakness, and vice, have alone made sermons necessary, so, nothing but such a perfection in wisdom and virtue, as the frailty of human nature will hardly admit of, can ever render them useless. But the obligation to prayer, is that which nothing can ever cancel or discharge : for, the more perfect wisdom and virtue grow, the more vehement and incessant will they render prayer ; which can never cease, so long as there remains any spark of the love of God in the soul, or any sense of his bounty and benefits. Could prayer have an end, the pleasure of the soul must end with it ; since the smothering of strong affections

* ‘ I do verily believe, that, if parents did their duty as they ought, the word publicly preached would not be the ordinary means of regeneration in the church ; but only without the church, among infidels.’ — *Barter. Saint’s Rest*, iii. 14., *Works*, vol. iii. p. 223. — ED.

causes as great an uneasiness in the mind, as the venting of them gives relief, and consequently delight. Wherefore, so long as there is love in the soul, it will take pleasure in declaring that love; and, so long as there is gratitude, it will delight in expressing that gratitude; and, whilst it continues virtuous and happy, it must have these affections. Therefore prayer must be as eternal, as the soul itself.

LXXIX. All virtue is imitation: every wise man knowing full well, that his own virtue is no original, but a faint and imperfect copy only, of the divine perfections. It is plain, that whosoever would gain the affection of other men, must form his humour to the model of theirs; otherwise, he can never hope to be successful, since likeness and agreeableness of humours, is that which creates mutual friendship and affection. And the same method must be observed towards God: his favour must be obtained by resemblance; and his image must be drawn upon the soul, before he will place his love upon it. And I know not, whether this will not be the main question at the day of judgment, ‘Whose image and superscription does he bear?’ This will be the mark, that shall discover to whom every soul belongs, whether to God, or to the devil; a proprietorship, according to which, they must be finally disposed of. For, though both body and soul must share in the judgment, yet the soul alone shall undergo the trial. It will not, therefore, be by a demure or sanctified look, but by a virtuous and sanctified soul, that

every one must be acquitted. Be ye perfect, as God is perfect, is the entire sum and substance of religion.

LXXX. How pride can so far intoxicate the understandings of men, as to make them really think themselves exalted above other men, by riches and honour, and, in the vanity of their hearts, to look down with contempt upon their supposed inferiors, — is prodigious, usual as it is. Certainly, it cannot be imagined, that the richer clothes create the nobler heart, or the choicer meats the more honourable blood. Though, with all the senseless boasting of noble blood, it is the quails and woodcocks, and other dainties, that give it all the pre-eminence it has, above that which is bred by coarser diet; with the adoption of gout and scurvy, and other honourable attendant diseases, into the bargain.

LXXXI. Every body that wishes me well, seeing I have built a convenient and pleasant house, to show their kindness, are apt to wish that I may live long to enjoy it: which I take very kindly of them, since I know their wishes are correspondent to their own natural desires. Though, at the same time, I perceive, that their notions of life and happiness, and mine, are very different. For I cannot think this life worth desiring, barely upon account of pleasure; and I should be ashamed to put up so unworthy a petition to the all-wise God, as to prolong my life, for no other end, than for the short and insignificant enjoyments that attend it. As if there were no expectation of a more complete and perfect happiness, than what we enjoy in this

world; as if the flesh and blood with which our souls are invested, were the only vehicles of pleasure; and, by consequence, as if the Almighty Creator had made creatures to be more happy than himself, and those innumerable companies of blessed spirits, who rejoice in the beams of his glory. God is infinitely gracious to man: indulging him in the innocent gratification of his appetites; and supplying his wants, while he continues in this world. But that is a very wrong reason, why a man should desire that he may never go out of this world. He ought to consider, that his conveniences are suited to the necessities of this life, and are no longer useful, than that lasts; and it were unreasonable to expect, that his life should be lengthened and proportioned to his conveniences. As long as we live in this world, a house is necessary; but it is not necessary to live, because we have a house. So long as cold weather lasts, a cloak is necessary; but nobody would wish the continuance of ill weather, because he had a cloak. This life, of which we are here so fond, is but the dawning to life; * and we must be conducted through that gloomy, but short passage of death, into the bright and perfect day, that shall be eternally enlightened by the splendour of the divine glories in heaven. It is immortality that makes life a desirable blessing; without this, it would be but an unprofitable and burthensome trifle, preserved with

* ‘Dies iste, quem tanquam extremum reformidas, æterni natalis est.’ — *Seneca, Epist. 102.* — Ed.

anxiety, and quitted with terror. And how great a weakness of faith must we discover, when we are capable of preferring a bauble of a house, before the eternal enjoyment of the Almighty God ; who will first enlarge all the capacities of the soul to love, desire, resemble, and adore him ; and then abundantly replenish it with suitable gratifications. There, the soul, languishing and thirsting after wisdom and truth, will have free access to the blessed and eternal fountain of them, to satiate itself with boundless draughts of delight : there, it may ever gratify, ever satisfy, without ever extinguishing, its unmeasurable desires. For the pleasures of the soul are quite different from those of sense, which are destroyed by fruition ; as they must needs be, since pleasure, which has its entire existence in desire, must necessarily increase and abate, live and perish, with it. But, though I say, that pleasure has its existence in desire, yet desire is so far from being productive of pleasure, that it always creates pain and uneasiness, so long as the desire remains wholly unsatisfied. For, though nothing pleases us, but what we like and desire, yet we must have some sort of enjoyment of what we like, before it can give us pleasure : and, for this reason, the hungering and thirsting after righteousness, is very different from the hungering and thirsting after meat and drink. The thirsting of David's soul after the living God, was very different from that of the hart after the water brooks, though the allusion is very lively

and elegant. For none ever thirst after God and righteousness, but those who, in some measure, already enjoy the one, and possess the other. And, from the knowledge of the pleasure arising from that lesser degree of enjoyment and possession, they are still desiring and thirsting after a greater. Happy, notwithstanding, in what they possess and enjoy, and ravished with the assured expectation of a more full and complete felicity, full in its abundance, and complete in its duration. Whereas, in the natural hunger and thirst of the body, it is pain and want that create the desire; and pleasure proceeds only from the ceasing of the pain, and relieving of the want; which makes it differ extremely from the other cases, where the want of enjoyment is continually relieved, and the present supplies, which God affords to the eager desire, at once gratify and inflame it. There are but two things, which, were they not both limited by entire resignation to the will of my God, would make me desirous of life; the one for my own advantage, the other for my dear child's. And I most humbly implore of thee, my ever gracious Lord, to grant me for myself, to live till thou hast so far perfected my faith, love, obedience, and sorrow for having ever offended thee, that I may be received into thy everlasting favour. Which I have confidence, through thy infinite mercy, and through the mediation of thy blessed son Jesus Christ, that thou wilt grant me, and not suffer thy poor servant to perish for ever. And, for my dear child, I humbly com-

mit both her and myself to thy protection; and beg, that thou wilt graciously be pleased to bless her with a continued innocence and purity of life; bestowing upon her plentifully of thy grace and wisdom, and making her thy accepted servant, to trust in thee, to love thee, and to obey thee faithfully, all the days of her life, that thou mayest give her eternal bliss in thy heavenly kingdom. And, for her instruction in virtue, my tenderness inclines me to wish to live to see her confirmed in it. For I must confess, that in my conflicts with aversion to death, and love of the world, when I consider her youth, and the scarcity of friends, I always find that the weakest, and worst-guarded part, in which I can be assaulted. But I most humbly resign both her and myself, to the determination of thy divine will; which I beg may always be done; and that thou wilt ever make mine, most joyfully conformable to it. In full confidence, that thou wilt answer my humble petition, to make my dear child a virtuous woman, zealously mindful evermore to perform her duty to thee, by such ways and methods, as thou, in thy infinite wisdom and mercy, shalt think fit.

LXXXII. Where there is not a strong faith, there can be no love; where there is no love, there can be no desire; where there is no desire, there is no notion or conception of beauty; and, where there is no notion or conception of beauty, there can be no delight: and, by consequence, there is no beauty in that holiness which is not supported by faith, and pursued with delight. O grant me,

my most adorable God, evermore to serve thee in the beauty of holiness; and give me all those graces and virtues, which are necessary for so glorious, so sublime a performance!

LXXXIII. So teach me, great God, to number my days, that I may apply my heart unto wisdom! This is an arithmetick truly worth learning; most of our errors being committed for want of a right calculation of time and eternity; for want of computing how much we have to do in time, and how long to continue in eternity: how unspeakable the concern; how short and uncertain the preparation. Display, good Lord, I beseech thee, to my understanding, the inestimable treasures of thy truth; the only treasures, of which I am ambitious; the knowledge of thy truth being that invaluable pearl of wisdom, which I am most desirous to purchase at any rate. Instruct me in all my addresses to thee, and dictate all my petitions; grant, that they may always be for those things that may fit me to please thee, and not for such as may be the fittest to please myself; and, for an accumulation of blessing, so influence my soul with thy divine spirit, that thy will may ever be my pleasure.

LXXXIV. Every man, when he perceives the near approach of death, finds it reasonable to betake himself to hearty prayer for the mercy and favour of God. And can any one be so infatuated, as to think it fit to pass his whole life in an entire ignorance and neglect of that Almighty Being, to whom at last he will be obliged to resort, as to his

only refuge and support? But so much, in poor man, does base fear prevail above reason ; so much stronger an influence has the terror of almighty power, over man's degenerate spirit, than the charming allurements of infinite bounty and goodness.

LXXXV. How faint are the impressions which truth usually makes upon the mind of man? not for want of force in the one, but through the obduracy of the other. What an unhappy skill has vice and folly, in forging such wretchedly hardened armour for the soul, as will not suffer it to be penetrated by truth, though never so sharp and piercing? A miserable defence, against an instrument that is never employed to wound, but to cure ; but a treacherous shield, that never opposes those cruel weapons, which give not only wounds, but death.

LXXXVI. If the passions of men make their lives uncomfortable, and are hardly to be endured, for so short a space, how can they be borne with, when they shall become eternal? For I take it for granted, that one mighty torment of damnation will be an excessive heightening and enlarging of all the passions, with an utter deprivation of any prospect of enjoyment. But, on the other side, if the love of wisdom and virtue be so sweet and delightful to the soul in this its imperfect state, what floods and torrents of joy will be poured in upon it, when all its affections shall be boundlessly and eternally enlarged for their reception? As doubtless they will be, to the inconceivable bliss of those

most happy souls, who shall be received into the everlasting favour of the Almighty. And that I, and my dear child, may be of that blessed number, grant, my most merciful God, I humbly beseech thee, for the sake of thy dear son Jesus Christ, our Saviour!

LXXXVII. Honesty is like a strong perfume : one little grain of it suffices to enrich a great mass, that had neither scent nor value before. How little honesty is there in the world? and, yet, what numbers of men, that by some or other are termed honest? A small proportion of this noble, though unfashionable virtue, is sufficient to gain the vulgar esteem; though the most of it, that one who truly endeavours to be an honest man, can make himself master of, will scarce give him a tolerable opinion of himself: for here it is requisite, that his desires should enlarge themselves beyond what he possesses; or else, a very moderate degree of it will make him sit down contented. Some men are satisfied, if they can but shelter themselves from ignominy, under the shadow of honesty; and others, if they have but enough of it to procure them a pretty good reputation, have as much as they desire; and, I am sure, if the esteem of unthinking people were of any value, much more than they deserve, since that is all they aim at. Thus the first sort betake themselves to honesty, as they would to a spreading tree in a storm, only for shelter and protection; the latter make use of it, as they who want true ones, do of false jewels, to

amuse the world with their counterfeit lustre, and deceitfully to procure themselves that respect, to which they had no just title. What worth, then, must there be in the thing itself, whose bare appearance can give protection, and confer esteem? But, as honesty deserves diligently to be sought after, so it is most difficult to be acquired; being, as I may say, an elixir extracted from all the virtues; never right, when any one of them is wanting in its composition. For, it is not enough, to be honest, only so long as a man may be honest without disadvantage; he ought to be so, at the peril of all he is worth. Nor is it sufficient to be honest, only so long as a man may be honest with safety; he ought to preserve his integrity, at the expence of his life. He that designs to be a real honest man, must think that the most honourable character he can possibly aspire to; and must have the least falsehood or injustice in as great a detestation, as murder or blasphemy. So far must he be from doing wilfully a dishonest action, that his soul must abhor a dishonest thought. In short, he ought to be unmoveable and unshaken; neither to be deterred by fear, nor allured by advantage, but to be proof against all temptations; and he should value his sincerity equally with the favour of his God, believing that he shall undoubtedly forfeit the one, whenever he foregoes the other.

LXXXVIII. Wisdom, which is sometimes called holiness, sometimes righteousness, is that vital principle, whose separation is as fatal to the soul, as the

separation of the soul is to the body. It is that lamp of faith, which enlightens it, and introduces into it those beauties, and glories of the divine perfections, which irresistibly inflame it with love and desire. A love, whose pure fire purges the soul from dross and impurity; a love, that utters peace and pardon to it; a love, that vanquishes sin, and triumphs over temptation. Great God, I beseech thee, cleanse and enlarge all the clogged and narrow passages of my soul, that thy glories may rush in, and perpetually feed it with this divine flame, constantly to ascend, with an uncontrollable motion, in praises and adorations, to thy heavenly throne!

LXXXIX. I make no doubt, that many people would be apt to judge, by my way of living, and by what I write, that my thoughts and life are the effects of a dismal melancholy. Which is a great mistake. For, I thank God, they are both of them the effect of his infinite goodness, as they are the cause of a far more serene and pleasant life, than ever I led under the conduct of folly and passion. My vicious inclinations made me but too well acquainted with the pleasures that most men are so fond of; nor did I naturally want pride and ambition, sufficient to have pushed me to the utmost extravagance of endeavouring to procure riches and honour. But, my gracious God, whom I can never enough love and adore, for his invaluable mercies to me, has clearly discovered to my reason, the wretched folly of such pursuits; and has so far strengthened it, as not to suffer it to be

overpowered and dazzled, with such childish and gaudy vanities. So that, my contempt of the world, and its advantages, is not for want of knowing the value of them; but that very knowledge makes me despise them. It is natural, amongst men that are ignorant of what it is that dictates and governs their own thoughts, and the thoughts of others, to wonder at any body, whose judgment and opinion differs from their own; not considering, that the same diversity of judgment and opinion, causes the same astonishment on the other side. But that wonder ceases, when, by reason and reflection, a man is led to an insight of that common nature, which he shares with the rest of mankind. For then, he readily discovers the sources and causes of all their severally different opinions, and the various conceptions arising from each passion, as far as the windings of such an intricate labyrinth are capable of being traced. No wise man, therefore, will wonder even at the folly of another; because I take it for granted, that the wisest of men, now-a-days, have found difficulty enough to overcome their own folly, and to restrain their still natural propensity to it. Which will incline them, not only to be thankful to that infinite wisdom, which has so graciously communicated itself to them, but, to be very compassionate of the weaknesses and follies of other men, and heartily to wish and pray for their relief. But a presumptuous, inconsiderate fool has no mercy for those, who have different sentiments from his own; which is the cause of so

much blind zeal, and so many barbarous persecutions, as have been in the world. Men in power and authority, being unreasonably bent to model the opinions of others exactly to their own, without considering or caring whether they be right or wrong; and without imagining, that they have any dependence, upon any being, greater or wiser than themselves.

XC. It would seem strange, perhaps, should I say, that it is a sin to be miserable, and that it is a sin not to be happy. But yet, when narrowly examined, I believe it will appear no more strange than true. For the effect must needs partake of the cause, and misery must therefore be undoubtedly sinful, because it is acknowledged to be the offspring of sin. But there are two sorts of miseries incident to mankind: the one not to be avoided, and therefore to be pitied; the other to be remedied, and therefore inexcusable. The former sort, are such as are occasioned by bodily indispositions; the latter, are the diseases of a vicious mind. To the miseries of a distempered body, we are enslaved by nature; to those of a distempered mind, we voluntarily submit. In the former case, we want power to break our chain; in the latter, we want will to obtain our freedom. I think it cannot be denied, that it is a sin to be miserable, through the vice of the mind; since it is apparent, that those miseries generally proceed, either from desiring things vicious or impossible, or from dreading things natural or unavoidable; in all which

cases, we are guilty of disobeying or repining at the will of God, to which we ought cheerfully, and in all humility, to submit: for, by desiring things vicious, we discover our disobedience; by desiring things impossible, we demonstrate our impiety; and, by dreading things natural and unavoidable, we betray our infidelity. Thus, it being proved, that it is a sin to be miserable, it will follow, by undeniable consequence, that it is a sin not to be happy. It is evident, that true happiness consists in such a peaceful tranquillity and contentment of mind, as is neither to be ruffled by fear, nor discomposed by desire. And it is as certain, that such a blessed temper can never be obtained without faith, love, obedience, and submission, in their several relations to God, and all of them to a great perfection. Now, happiness resulting from the union of these virtues, and the want of any one of them being sinful, it must be granted, that it is a sin not to be happy.

XCI. Whosoever thinks himself wise enough, or virtuous enough, is in a fair way never to be either. He that engages in those difficult paths, must keep in perpetual motion; there is no stopping, without losing ground. He must consider, that if his undertaking be glorious, it is also laborious; that he has a strong tide to stem; which, if he does not keep resolutely advancing, will inevitably bear him down the stream. The current of passion is fierce and rapid, not to be resisted by feeble reason, and wavering resolution. But, if the difficulties to be

overcome be great, the prize to be obtained exceeds all value. He, therefore, whose noble ambition pushes him to the pursuit of wisdom and virtue, must not be discouraged at their height; nor must he think to rest upon the steep ascent of those aspiring mountains, which hide their lofty tops in heaven; thither we must climb, before we can reach them, securely to sit down, and enjoy eternal happiness and repose.

XCII. It fares with a feeble mind, too weak to resist the powerful assaults made upon it, by the cares, necessities, and contingencies of life, — as it does with the poor bee in a windy day, who, spying the flowers which afford honey, makes eager attempts to settle upon them; but the impetuous storm drives it away, and often obliges it to rest upon some tasteless plant, from whence it can extract nothing that is useful, nothing that is sweet. And, in the same manner, the inconstant mind, not sufficiently upheld by wisdom and virtue, is apt to be hurried from the objects of its pleasure and happiness, and forced to fix upon such objects, as not only yield it neither, but envenom it with anxiety and disquiet.

XCIII. Either we owe no obedience to God Almighty; or else we owe the most exact obedience, that it is possible for us to pay him. For, if any duty belongs to him, it must necessarily be the most perfect duty, that the utmost capacity of our nature can enable us to perform; even as per-

fect, as an indigent creature is capable of expressing to his bountiful Creator.

XCIV. No! By the grace of God, justice and equity, not favour and interest, shall be the pillars I will make use of, to support my fortune in the world. When those are too weak to uphold it, let it take its chance. And I hope I should be able to take the same course, if my life itself were the stake at issue. For I had much rather lose my right or my life, by another man's injustice, than obtain the one, or preserve the other, by any base pursuit, or unworthy application of my own. Nor shall I ever value, or seek for, any favour, but that of my God; to whom he that has grace enough to commit himself, may with security enough commit his fortune. Of him, therefore, I humbly beg, to dispose both of me and of mine, perfectly according to his own pleasure; trusting that he will always vouchsafe to support my faith, whatever else he shall permit to fail me.

XCV. Faith, that fruitful parent of all other graces, can never be too carefully cultivated and improved. It is the source of pleasure, the lamp of wisdom, and the soul of virtue. It is that mysterious ladder, by which the soul ascends to heaven, and heaven descends to the soul; by which a joyful correspondence is continually held, between it and its Creator. Faith is that celestial flame, which purifies the soul from dross and pollution; and which opens in it a new and glorious scene, gilded with the ineffable brightness of the Deity, adorned with the

inconceivable delights of blissful eternity, and enriched with holy hopes, pure desires, love divine, and joy unutterable.

XCVI. No man can truly be termed an honest man, who is capable of being moved, by any temptation whatsoever, to be dishonest. For, though there were but one temptation in the world that had power to work that effect, yet such a person still lies under the possibility of being an ill man. And the best that can be said of him is, that he is honester than thousands of others; and has but that one unhappy exception, to his being a perfectly upright and virtuous man. A citadel may be called strong, in comparison of a weaker, because it can hold out a longer siege; but, if any force be able to make it surrender, it cannot be called impregnable: neither can the soul of man be positively termed virtuous, till it is so fortified, as to become impregnable against all manner of vice.

XCVII. Virtue and Vice are words better known in the world by their sound, than by their true meaning. Men take the liberty to give such an interpretation to them, as is most suitable to their own fancy and inclination. But he who thinks it necessary to lead a virtuous life, and designs to apply himself heartily to the doing so, must come to a better and juster understanding of what the things are, that are really meant by those words. I take it, that virtue consists in acting conformably to the divine attributes and perfections of God; and vice, in acting in opposition and contradiction to those

perfections. This latter is very properly called sinning against God ; as offending not only against his commands, but against his very essence. For, as acting falsely and deceitfully, oppressively and unjustly, cruelly and maliciously, covetously or impurely, is acting viciously, because plainly against the attributes of truth, justice, mercy, bounty and purity in God : so, acting faithfully and sincerely, generously and justly, kindly and mercifully, charitably and temperately, is acting virtuously, because in conformity to those several divine attributes. And, as every reasonable man must conceive the Deity to be the exact model of perfection, so he must necessarily contemplate Him as the model for his most exact imitation.

XCVIII. Strife and contest are evidences of difference and contrariety ; and difference and contrariety demonstrate clearly a plurality of principles : for, where there is unity, there is no contradiction ; all contest must, at least, be between two. Fire being of an uncompounded nature, has no variance in itself ; but an addition of water to it, causes a strife, and plainly discovers the diversity of elements. Thus man, were he a simple, uncompounded principle, would never find any strife or contradiction in himself, any more than there is in other animals, in whom no such thing can be perceived. But, being compounded of the two very different principles of soul and body, he is sensible of continual disputes and contradictions in himself. Which, I think, is a very sufficient demonstration

of the existence of those two different principles of soul and body in his composition. Nay further, there is a possibility of the one being pleased, while the other grieves; of the one being delighted, while the other feels pain; as has been evident, in men that have chosen to suffer punishment, rather than do a vicious unjustifiable action. And, though it is sufficiently known, that the body abhors pain and dissolution, yet there have been those, who have rejoiced in flames, and delighted in death. A manifest triumph of the soul over the body; which shows it to be, not only a different, but a far more excellent principle, than any thing in mere corporeal life.

XCIX. I have formerly had it in my thoughts, that imperfection is an undeniable argument of perfection; which I find confirmed by this further reflection, that whatsoever is imperfect, has some degrees of perfection in it; as a part has some portion of the whole, and is an argument of a whole. If, therefore, that which is imperfect, has some degree of perfection, as must be acknowledged, then it is plain, that there is such a thing as perfection; since it is impossible, that there should be any degrees, of a thing which is not. The next inquiry must be, where is this perfection lodged? It is evidently, not in the insensible, nor in the brutish, part of the creation; nor yet in man, to whom his little portion of reason must clearly evidence that it is not in him; though it as clearly discovers, that imperfection is in him. Where then

shall we seek it, or expect to find it, but in thee, O infinitely perfect, all-wise, all-mighty, all-glorious, and all-bountiful God! My soul, then, most humbly adores thee, and begs this inestimable blessing, that thou wilt enable it most fervently, sincerely, uninterruptedly, and acceptably, to love, serve, and adore thee, from this moment to all eternity, for Jesus Christ his sake, thy blessed son, my most merciful Redeemer; to whom, with thee, and the Holy Spirit, the one great God, be evermore attributed all honour, power, praise, majesty, and perfection!

C. We can assign an end for the creation of all beasts, fowls, fishes, trees and plants, and even of the sun, moon, and stars; namely, for the use, support, and convenience of man. And can it be imagined, that man was made for no other end, than to consume and devour the rest of the creation; and that he himself is a useless, worthless, insignificant thing, though lord and master of the whole earth? Great God! that thou, whose power, wisdom, and glory shine so bright in all thy works, shouldst yet remain almost undiscovered to thy creature man; on whom thou hast bestowed a rational soul, on purpose to enable him to arrive at the felicity of knowing, loving, obeying, and adoring thee. Which, grant that I may faithfully perform; and account those duties the highest excellencies and advantages of my being; and enjoy the blessing of them to all eternity!

CI. Upon whatsoever foundation happiness is

built, when that foundation fails, happiness must be destroyed. It is wisdom, therefore, to chuse such a foundation for it, as is not liable to destructive accidents. If happiness be founded upon riches, it lies at the mercy of theft, deceit, oppression, war, and tyranny; if, upon fine houses and costly furniture, one spark of fire is able to consume it; if, upon wife, children, friends, health, or life, a thousand diseases, and ten thousand fatal accidents, have power to destroy it. But, if it be founded upon the infinite bounty and goodness of God, and upon those virtues that entitle to his favour, its foundation is immoveable, and its duration eternal.

CII. Could I ever sufficiently value the worth and benefit of that noble virtue faith, I might be induced to think I had already mentioned it often enough. But every degree of advancement in the knowledge of it, discovers such infinite beauties and excellencies, that, were I to live a thousand years, and were able to employ my whole time in meditating upon this one incomparable virtue alone, I must, of necessity, leave much more unthought and unadmired concerning it, than my mind, by such slow progresses as it is now capable of making towards wisdom and knowledge, could possibly, in that space of time, comprehend. This, to many people, might seem a studied encomium, rather than an urgent truth. But I do not desire to amuse myself with such trifling conceits: truth is the thing I labour after; and I hope that great

Being, who is environed with the bright glories of it, will vouchsafe to shed a portion of its pure enlightening rays upon my soul, darkened and clouded with sin and ignorance. If the expression will be allowed, I may say, that there is as great a variety of climates in the mind of man, as there is in the globe of the earth. The one occasioned by the nearness or distance of faith, as the other is by the vicinity or remoteness of the sun; the former shedding the same happy influences upon the soul, as the latter does upon the world. They who, by a near approach, bask in the beams of that illustrious virtue, like the inhabitants of Spain and Italy, enjoy the serenity and delights of so fortunate a situation; ever gratified with the rich and delicious fruits, which are its natural product. While those, who, by an unhappy separation, are divided from it, and have but rarely the benefit even of its short, remote, and imperfect glances, may be compared to the natives of Lapland and Norway, doomed and confined to uncomfortable regions, abounding only in ice and storms, barrenness and obscurity.

CIII. Virtue requires the utmost force, application, and exercise of the mind, both in order to its acquisition and preservation. True notions, and right ideas, are not to be acquired, without our utmost labour and industry: nor to be preserved, without unwearied thought and diligence. And yet, it is absolutely requisite, to have both true notions, and right ideas, of things; without which, we must inevitably make a thousand mistakes in

the disposal of our affections and aversions, fatal to our present tranquillity, and future happiness. For we cannot forbear to love and hate, according to our ideas of things; and, if our ideas deceive us, we shall love where we should hate, and hate where we should love. From which cause it is, that so many prefer folly and vice, to wisdom and virtue; deceived by the false ideas and conceptions formed in the mind, of the one and the other. How much, then, ought we to love, and how diligently to seek after, truth; which is the original of all our happiness, as falsehood is of all our misery? It is faith, it is truth, that is the only unerring light, which can guide and conduct the soul to present peace, and eternal felicity; and it is doubt and falsehood which endeavour to seduce it from both. But, after all, when we are happy enough to have obtained right ideas, and imprinted them upon the soul, we have then done but half our work. The other no less difficult part is, to preserve them bright and entire; and, by continual reflection and meditation, to renew those impressions which they have made: for, as these decay, our affections, as well as our aversions, will grow languid towards their objects; till, at last, by a long neglect, if we should be so wretchedly careless, virtue and vice will grow indifferent to us: and that indifference, in the end, will naturally terminate in the preference of vice, and the rejection of virtue. Than which, there is but one greater curse attending upon folly; and that is, the soul's eternal confine-

ment to it, even after the discovery of its misery and deformity :

Scorn the world, abandon folly,
Purchase faith, that glorious treasure ;
Faith is wisdom, wisdom virtue,
Virtue truth, and truth is pleasure.

CIV. I make no doubt but many think a contemplative life, an idle life. But they who are of that opinion, know better what belongs to the labour of the hands, than to that of the mind ; to the force of the body, than to the vigour of the soul. That body may be able to bear a great burthen, which would find itself too weak to support the violent impulses of an active mind ; and would sooner languish, tire, and grow lean, with mental exercise, than with corporeal. That metal would resist the weaker assaults of a common fire, which would be immediately forced to yield and dissolve, by the subtile and impetuous flames of the piercing lightning. The thinnest bodies make the most quick and violent impressions ; a rapid stream will do that, which a cannon bullet cannot effect ; and the furious rage of a tempest surpasses the force of water ; though the yet thinner body of fire is less to be resisted, than both the former. If, then, the most solid bodies are not able to oppose the efforts of those which are more thin and pure, how unequal a match is flesh and blood, to the violent concussions of an active spirit ? *

* ‘ It is an acknowledged truth, that the most yielding, are also the most powerful agents in the natural world. Those

CV. This day, I have lived forty-two years; being born in the year 1661. And I humbly thank my most gracious God, for having given me life, and that he did not destroy it, whilst it was miserably clogged with sin and folly. I humbly adore thy glorious Majesty, for having given me a capacity of loving, obeying, and contemplating thee; and, consequently, a foretaste of happiness eternal, in the adoration of thee. Give me, I implore thee, a power to exercise this privilege, in the most perfect manner, that thy infinite bounty shall enable me to do; and grant, that the remainder of my life may be spent in the exactest performance of every part of my duty to thee, for Jesus Christ's sake.

CVI. In any adversity that happens to us in the world, we ought to consider, that misery and affliction are not less natural than snow and hail, storm and tempest: and that it were as reasonable to hope for a year without winter, as for a life without trouble. Life, how sweet soever it seems, is a draught mingled with bitter ingredients. Some drink deeper than others, before they come at these

finer elements, which scarcely afford perceptible resistance to our touch, are yet, in the hands of Omnipotence, the great movers of this earthly system; and we learn from late discoveries, that their energy increases, exactly as their substance is attenuated and refined; whilst we are equally assured, that the hardest, the most unyielding, and most impenetrable bodies, are absolutely void of all intrinsic power.' — *Jebb's Practical Sermons*, p. 249.

ingredients : but, if they do not swim at the top for youth to taste them, it is ten to one but old age will find them thick in the bottom. And it is the employment of faith and patience, and the work of wisdom and virtue, to teach us to drink the sweet part down with pleasure and thankfulness, and to swallow the bitter without reluctance.

CVII. He that has pleasure in himself, is pleased with every thing ; and he that wants that pleasure, is pleased with nothing : but to think reasonably, and act reasonably, will give a man pleasure in himself ; therefore to think reasonably and act reasonably, is the sure way to be happy. To illustrate this argument, it is necessary to consider, that the pleasure of a fool flows from things without himself ; whereas the pleasure of a wise man springs up within himself : the former arises from the bodily senses, the latter from the understanding ; the one is the pleasure of the body, the other of the soul. Now, it is evident, that the body has not, at all times, power to communicate its pleasure to the soul ; no ! not even to the soul of the most vicious fool : which makes its pleasures very imperfect ; since they extend but to one half of the man. But the pleasures of the soul never fail to communicate themselves to the body ; and, by that communication, are rendered as perfect as our being is capable of ; because they become the pleasures of the whole man. To give an instance of this : when envy, anger, grief, or any other passion, disturbs the mind, all the gratifications that can enter by

the senses of the body, are not able to give it pleasure ; nor is the man, under these disturbances of mind, capable of being happy. But, when the mind is freed from all perplexing and disquieting passions, and is at liberty both to think and to act reasonably, without any opposition from the body, such a happy disposition of the soul necessarily diffuses and communicates itself to the body, and gives pleasure to the whole entire man. And, under this pleasing temper of mind, whatsoever portion of pleasure the body is capable of contributing, will considerably raise and increase the stock of happiness, which before was great enough not to stand in need of any addition. Our main care, therefore, must be, not to abandon bodily pleasures that are innocent, and consistent with wisdom and virtue, since they are capable of contributing to our happiness ; but to avoid laying in, too lavishly, such stores of them, as may oppress and stifle the supreme reasonable pleasure of the mind ; that flame kindled by wisdom, and maintained by virtue : without which, it is impossible to enjoy any tolerable or lasting measure of happiness.

CVIII. Doubts and uncertainty are the most general roots of all human misery and discontent, in virtuous as well as vicious men. The vicious man often doubts, that, by following his inclinations he may destroy his happiness ; and the virtuous man will be sometimes too apt to doubt, that he has in vain washed his hands in innocence ; and

that, by renouncing his inclinations, he has abandoned his happiness. But we must take care not to permit ourselves to think, that we are out of the way, because we walk out of the road of the generality of the world ; on the contrary, we may rest assured, that the narrowest path, and where we find the least company, is the right way.

CIX. So long as virtue does not appear lovely to a man, it is in vain for him to imagine that he can love God ; since it is impossible to love the author of the injunction, whilst the duty enjoined is repugnant and distasteful to us. Did ever a slothful servant cordially love his master ? Or did ever a faithful, diligent servant, who was convinced of the reasonableness of all his master's commands, hate him ? No : where duty and reason are perfectly reconciled, affection will instantly unite itself to them ; and then obedience will become not merely an easy, but a delightful task.

CX. Grief and discontent have generally their foundation in desire : so that, whosoever can obtain the sovereignty over his desire, will be master of his happiness. On the other hand, all such desires as occasion grief and discontent, are founded upon weakness or ignorance ; therefore, we must gain possession of the contrary qualities, which are wisdom and constancy, before we can reasonably hope to be masters of our desires. The two chief heads, to which all human griefs and discontents may be reduced, bodily pains and indispositions excepted, are these ; either we desire to have what

we cannot possess, or else we desire to be freed from what we cannot get rid of. And it appears plainly, that both these sorts of desires are founded upon weakness and ignorance; being founded upon impossibilities, which it must be either weakness or ignorance to languish after. For, if the things which we desire are in our own power, there is no cause of grief; and if they are not, it is vain and unreasonable to grieve. Sometimes, indeed, we make ourselves miserable, by desiring things possible; but then, they are such as are hurtful and inconvenient: so that, in this case, though our desires are grounded upon possibility, they are yet grounded upon inconsistency, which is altogether as bad; since the gratification of such desires is incompatible with our happiness. Thus, generally, our discontents are owing to our folly and impiety: to our folly, because they are vain and fruitless; and to our impiety, because we cannot, as we ought, submit to the divine will, and cheerfully acquiesce in the divine determinations. A manifest proof, either that we think ourselves wise enough to contrive our own happiness; or, that we mistrust the infinite bounty of God, lest it should fall short in the distribution of it to us. As to grief for the loss of friends, which still proceeds from impossible desire, it must necessarily flow from one of these two causes: either that we think their death, a diminution of our happiness, or of theirs; or else that we grieve we know not why, and, consequently, that our grief is unreasonable.

If the diminution of our own enjoyment cause our lamentation, we are moved by interest and self-love, not by the love of our friend. On the other hand, if the diminution of our friend's enjoyment be the occasion of it, we must have an ill opinion of his condition. But, if our felicity depends either upon friends, or any thing else in this world, it is very uncertain; and if we conceive, that the felicity of our friends is entirely dependent upon the present union of soul and body, our faith is as doubtful as our happiness. O good God, how many degrees of doubt wilt thou allow to enter into the composition of saving faith, if uncompounded faith be too sublime for human nature! If ten degrees of doubt for one of faith, will not be accepted, I fear the number of those who are saved by faith, is very small. O great God, increase my faith! Increase the faith of all mankind that have it, and bestow it upon those who want it, out of thy infinite compassion. And let the defects of our faith be supplied by thy mercy, through Jesus Christ our Saviour.

CXI. I would examine whether grief be an effect of infidelity; and if it appear to be so, I am sure we ought to endeavour, by all means, as far as possible, to banish it out of our souls. Our Saviour tells us, that a sparrow does not fall to the ground, without the knowledge and will of God, and that the very hairs of our head are numbered; by which doctrine, he would more forcibly inculcate, that nothing befalls man without his knowledge and appointment. Since, therefore, whatsoever happens

to man in this world, is either directed by the will, or consented to by the permission, of God, what ground has grief to stand upon, but human weakness? All opposition to the will of God, is wrestling with his power; all reluctance to his appointments, and repining at them, is contending; so far as man is able to contend, with almighty power, by condemning and disapproving the exercise of it, and avowing that we would oppose and contradict it, if we were able; which is the most insolently foolish impiety imaginable. And, for things that befall us through the bare permission of God, where he does not exert his own immediate power to bring them to pass, — though, in this case, it were not impious to grieve, yet it would be unreasonable; since, where there is a power, and a propensity, in any means sufficient to effect a thing, unless it should please God to supersede that power, which he does not think fit to do, but permits it to act according to its own propensity, — I say, that, in this case, the non-interposition of the Almighty power, leaves an absolute force in that means, to produce that effect: so that, the accident which it occasions is as inevitable, as if it had been actually performed by Almighty power; and, therefore, it would be unreasonable to lament it. Nay, in truth, I think myself obliged, upon further consideration, to retract my saying, that, in such cases, it would be no impiety to grieve; because, though this were not to repine at Providence, for doing something, which we would have undone, — yet it

is evidently repining at it, for not putting a stop to the power of second causes, and, by consequence, for not doing something, which we would have done; which is the same thing in effect. But as to the sort of grief, which, I said, shared of impiety, I mean only such a grief, as is occasioned by such actions as are the appointment of divine Providence, and not by such as he permits to be within the compass of our own determination and performance. For there is a grief, that does not proceed from our contradiction to the will of God, but from our having acted in a manifest contradiction to it, which is called repentance. And though, by this grief, we cannot revoke the sins which we have committed, yet we discover by it our inclination and desire, if it were possible, to revoke them; and we, thereby, give a testimony of our sincere abhorrence of them, and of our purpose and resolution never to be guilty of them more. Which grief is most effectual to the procuring its end, and therefore most reasonable: for, though it does not really revoke the sin, yet it actually annuls the punishment which would have attended the guilt of it; and has the desired effect of reinstating the sinner into the same degree of God's favour, which he enjoyed before the commission of it. But for our grief for the loss of friends, all that can be said of it, is this, that there is a strong propensity in human nature to lament the loss of any person, or thing, that is agreeable to us, and contributes to our comfort and satisfaction; and that

it is very difficult, to derive a sufficient power from reason to oppose its efforts. A man must not pretend, therefore, to claim an exemption from grief for the loss of his friend, who does not make it appear, from the rest of the actions of his life, that he uses his utmost endeavours to govern himself entirely by reason; to subdue his passions, and to get the mastery over pleasure, as well as over grief: otherwise, his not grieving, will be an evidence, rather of his ill-nature, than of his philosophy and religion. And that man who conforms his life and behaviour to the usual methods and customs of the generality of mankind in other things, ought likewise to do it in this; since it is reasonable to imagine, that his thoughts, in the main, resemble theirs: and death, according to the common notion of mankind, being looked upon as the greatest evil, it were the highest pitch of ill-nature, in a man that thinks it so, not to lament when it happens to his friend. But he who has established in his mind a firm belief, that death is no evil; but, on the contrary, esteems it to be only the passage to perfect felicity, may justly be allowed to have the same sentiments of it, in relation to his friend, as he would have in regard to himself. And now, having been so long on the consideration of grief, in order to a more perfect knowledge of it; I will enter upon that of another affection of the soul, which has a very close connection with it, and which is inseparable from it; and that is love. For it is plain we grieve, because we love either ourselves:

or something else. And since I have discovered, that grief is generally both impious and unreasonable, as deviating from that perfect obedience and resignation which we owe to God, and therefore is not allowable in a wise and virtuous man, who makes it his endeavour to know and perform his duty, with the utmost exactness he is able, — it may be expected, that I should tell what other marks and demonstrations a wise and virtuous man can give of his love ; which I think no difficult task to do. For, if grief be the only mark of his love to his friend, which a man is able to give, let him have as sorrowful a heart as he pleases, I would not give a rush for his friendship. These, in my opinion, are the true properties of valuable friendship, to desire to have done, and to endeavour to do, all imaginable good to those we love ; to assist and comfort them, as far as we are able, while they are in a capacity of being assisted and comforted by us ; to contribute, with all our power and skill, to their satisfaction and happiness ; to be as covetous of their advantage as of our own ; and, when any disaster, or unhappy accident of any kind, befalls them, to ransack all the faculties of our souls to procure their relief. But for lamentation, when a friend is no longer in a situation to receive, or to need, the marks of our affection, it is neither beneficial nor reasonable, either in respect of our friend, or of ourselves ; though the world, whose love generally flows only from their tongues and eyes, may think tears and complaints decent

things. And thus, they would make an easy amends by hypocrisy, for their want of real friendship.

CXII. It is as impossible for a vicious man, under the habit and power of vice, to conceive what is the pleasure of a man that is virtuous, as it is for a beast to conceive what is *his* pleasure. A beast is not endued with such a spirit, as is capable of receiving the ideas of vice. Neither is a vicious man endued with such purity, brightness, and elevation of soul, as to enable him to receive and apprehend the form of virtue. And, consequently, he is as great a stranger to the manner of a virtuous man's thinking, as a beast is to *his* manner of thinking.

CXIII. Amongst great numbers of men accounted rich, but few really are so. I take him to be the only rich man, that lives upon what he has, owes nothing, and is contented. For there is no determinate sum of money, nor quantity of estate, that can denote a man rich; since no man is truly rich, that has not so much as perfectly satiates his desire of having more. For the desire of more is want, and want is poverty.

CXIV. A fine gentleman may as well think to go abroad in a blustering day, without disordering his dress, as a wise man may fancy that he can abandon his mind to the trifling business and hurry of the world, without disordering his thoughts.

CXV. Thought is, undoubtedly, in a great measure, governed and directed by the affections. Which shows the necessity of subduing the affec-

tions to right reason ; otherwise, our thoughts can never be reasonable ; and all human actions are, or ought to be, governed by thought : therefore, such as the thoughts are, such must be the actions ; equally partaking of wisdom or folly. And I doubt that folly, by the natural consequence of this argument, has the greater share in the government of the world ; in the same manner as Themistocles said his little boy governed Athens ; ‘ For this child,’ said he, ‘ governs his mother, his mother me, and I the Athenians.’

CXVI. Since almost every man, in these parts of the world, thinks his salvation and happiness depend upon his being a Christian, it is highly necessary to know what is the true meaning, of the word, and the thing, Christian. In order to which, it must be observed, that, in all ages, the most reasonable men have applied themselves, with their utmost industry, to search after truth ; the knowledge of which, can alone be properly termed wisdom. And these were called philosophers, or lovers of wisdom ; of which there were several sects, according to the several doctrines and opinions of the authors, or beginners of them. So that, whosoever, upon the examination of the several doctrines of these philosophers, afterwards made choice of any one sect, preferring it to all the rest, and endeavoured to regulate his life and actions after its tenets, was called, according to the name of that sect, either a Stoic, Peripatetic, Epicurean, &c. Now, after many philosophers had introduced

several opinions, to instruct men how to arrive at their supreme happiness, — for this is the philosophy I mean, and the only one worth our care and thought, — Jesus Christ was born into the world; who, unacquainted with learning and its professors, taught a doctrine much more clear, reasonable, and excellent, than any which was ever known before; and, indeed, so far surpassing all human power of thought, that it were of itself sufficient to give him a title to Divinity, had there been no other arguments for his being the son of God. And the embracers of his doctrine were called Christians. But, though the bare profession of this admirable doctrine, is sufficient to give a man the name, yet something else is requisite to make him a real Christian; and that is, thoroughly to contemplate both the life and doctrine of our Saviour; to obtain, so far as possible, the same spirit; to enter into the same temper of mind; to be moved by the same influences, governed by the same principles; and, in short, to form the life, as exactly as possible, after his model; that is, to think as he thought, and act as he acted: and this, according to my notion, is that alone, which can truly and deservedly confer upon a man the name of Christian; though, perhaps, it may reduce the number of Christians within a narrow compass. For, I fear, there are as many that bear that title, who are not Christians *indeed*, as there were Israelites, who were not Israelites *indeed*. He, therefore, that aspires to be a Christian, must never slacken his

endeavours, till he really feels himself one. And this is very possible ; for the soul is as capable of the perception of things within itself, as the body is of heat or cold, hunger or thirst, ease or pain. And a man may as reasonably conclude, that he is a good Christian, without feeling himself such, as he may fancy that he is cold, or hungry, or in pain, without feeling that he is any one of them. It is evident, that a man may feel within himself whether he is, or is not, endued with the qualities belonging to a Christian ; and therefore ought not to rest satisfied of his being perfectly such, till he feels those qualities within him : till he finds himself, in relation to his God, firm in faith, fervent in love, humble, sincere, constant in obedience, and cheerful in resignation. Whilst he is labouring after these several graces, he is endeavouring to be a Christian ; and, when he *has* obtained them, he is most certainly a Christian *indeed*.

CXVII. Every sincerely virtuous man, fixed in the principles of virtue, and entirely influenced by reason, must needs be in a fair way to be a good Christian. Nor do I doubt, that, if Pythagoras, Socrates, Plato, with many other virtuous heathens, had been happy enough to have lived contemporary with our Saviour, and to have been acquainted with his life and precepts, they would readily have embraced the Christian doctrine, and been eminent in the first rank of its professors. Was it not the integrity and virtue of Joseph of Arimathea, and of Nathanael, that had fitted them for Christianity,

and that had disposed their mind for the reception of truth, when and wheresoever they could find it ? And, in my opinion, there had been sufficient reason for the belief of the Gospel delivered by our Saviour, though there had been neither predictions nor miracles to confirm his extraordinary mission ; and that upon this consideration. Every truly virtuous man feels in himself an utter abhorrence and aversion to falsehood and deceit, and is assured, that, so long as he continues under the influence of virtue, he is capable of neither ; for he knows, that virtue is a power conferred by God upon the mind of man, to capacitate him to act in conformity to the Divine will and commands : so long, therefore, as he feels this divine power in his soul, which is what the Scripture terms grace, he knows himself to be in no danger of being false or deceitful ; since this power and falsehood are inconsistent, and cannot possibly subsist in the mind of man at the same time. A virtuous man, thus conscious of his own principles, is acquainted with the effect that the same principles must necessarily have, in the minds of other men ; and, by consequence, discovering in the life, behaviour, and doctrine of our Saviour, by infinite degrees, the most exalted purity, virtue, and integrity, that ever any man was possessed of, he will be perfectly convinced, that it was impossible for any thing but truth to proceed from him. I trust, through God's great goodness, that even I myself am not capable of lying or deceiving, for any advantage, or upon any account what-

soever; and, from the abhorrence and aversion I feel to those detestable vices, which I beg my good God ever to continue in me, I am as confidently assured, that it was impossible for any thing but truth to proceed from the lips of the blessed Jesus, whose name I am not worthy to mention, as I am assured, that it is impossible for cold and darkness to proceed from the sun. He, then, who has so often owned himself to be the son of God, is certainly so. And my merciful Redeemer, through whose purity in life, satisfaction in death, and mediation in glory, I trust I shall receive the perfect remission of all my sins and corruptions, and enjoy the eternal felicity of loving, praising, serving, and adoring him, is assuredly God; to whom, with the Father, and Holy Spirit, I humbly ascribe all power and glory, world without end.

CXVIII. It were worth a man's while to consider, whether his present temper of mind be such as he would be willing to possess, as long as he lives. And if, upon reflection, he finds his soul overspread with malice, pride, envy, avarice, injustice, or any other vice, let him consider, whether that be the state he desires it should be in, when it leaves his body. If it be, let him acknowledge himself an atheist; if it be not, let him own himself a fool, and endeavour to grow wiser as soon as he can.

CXIX. Wheresoever pride predominates in the soul of man, self-love is the most powerful and active principle in that pride. The extraordinary

opinion of himself which a proud man has, makes the extravagant value he has for his own imaginary merit appear to him just, and the great contempt he has for all other men reasonable. And, from this vain and foolish conceit, he fancies, that all the bounties and blessings of Providence ought to centre in him ; and looks upon the prosperous events that happen to others, as so many unjust distributions of that good, to which he alone has a right. It is no wonder, therefore, that a man, possessed with such wild notions, should always be ready to bestow upon himself any advantage that lies in his power, how much soever it may be to the detriment of others, whom he considers as so many cyphers in the creation, and himself as the only significant figure. It is this excessive pride, this unreasonable self-love, which excites in the mind of man, all those motions and agitations, that hurry him to tyranny, oppression, fraud, rapine, cruelty, and almost every other mischievous and detestable vice ; so that, wherever this passion rules, she governs with an imperious sway, and is surrounded with a numerous retinue, composed of every ill. From this it is plain, that a wise and virtuous man can never be proud ; nor can he be exalted in his thoughts, at any advantages he has above others ; because he is conscious of his own weakness and inability to become either wise or virtuous, by any thing he finds in his own power. And his sense of the goodness of the bountiful God, in bestowing upon him more abundantly, what he has been

pleased more sparingly to vouchsafe to others, will inspire his soul with humility, thankfulness, and adoration. Besides, he will reflect, how unworthy he would be of so glorious a distinction, and of so invaluable, as well as undeserved a preference to other men, if he could be capable of acting so, as to seem to attribute any part of it to himself; and how just it would be in that adorable Being, to deprive him of those blessings which have flowed from the Divine bounty alone; and to degrade him to the lowest rank of human nature. But no reasonable man can think himself able to acquire and preserve wisdom by his own strength, when he knows, that either a blow or disease is capable of making an idiot of him: and thus, finding himself too weak to preserve wisdom, his reason will readily demonstrate to him, that he wants force to acquire it. But, on the contrary, a proud, and, which is all one, a foolish man, thinks nothing too good for himself, and every thing too good for others; he thinks he has an indisputable title to all the enjoyments of life, and that other men are unworthy of them. His pride and envy make him unconcerned, how little other men enjoy of happiness; whilst his viciously tender love for himself, gives him the vain conceit, that he alone ought of right to engross it: his narrow mind, therefore, is confined to the compass of his own body; whereas the virtuous, which is the only great and generous soul, admits of no limits to its bounty and love, but such as give bounds to the creation.

CXX. How wretchedly disposed is the heart of man towards God! In prosperity, it is apt to be full of neglect, in adversity, of repining; and as for love and obedience, they may crowd in, when the other two think fit to make room for them.

CXXI. I find the business upon which I have resolved, and in which I am employed, is, to oppose most of my natural inclinations: so that, if Nature be in the right, I am to blame in contradicting her; but, if not, which is the infallible truth, I doubt the greatest part of mankind are fatally in the wrong.

CXXII. The capacity of thinking, is a most noble and delightful faculty; but we have not the absolute government of it. It is often busy and waking in me, when my frail body would willingly be at rest; and it is many times heavy and drowsy, when I am desirous to keep it awake. We must, therefore, patiently watch and attend upon wisdom; and embrace every opportunity of conversing with her, that she will please to favour us with. For my own part, I have often wished, that four hours only of the four and twenty would sufficiently satisfy my body with sleep, that I might have the happiness of employing as many of the rest as possible, in the agreeable exercise of thought, the parent of wisdom.

CXXIII. The scheme and manner of our thinking is formed and altered, either by the impressions of outward objects upon the mind, by the inward disposition of the body affecting it, or by divine

impulse: so that every new temper of mind, displays a new scene of thought. But, notwithstanding that numberless variety of schemes of thinking, which roll with an incessant vicissitude in the mind, there is but one that is right, one that is reasonable; unity being the inseparable property of truth. Now, the first great difficulty, is to light on the right scheme; and the next, is to fix upon it: for it is this alone, which proceeds from the divine impulse; and this is continually combated by those other trains of thought, which arise from other causes; which makes it impossible for us firmly to retain, and establish the truth in our minds, without a force derived and continued to them, from the divine bounty and power. Which force, we must labour to procure; and act, as if we were able to deserve it; which force, O my great and good God, bestow, I beseech thee, upon thy most unworthy creature, for his sake who enjoyed it most amply and perfectly, leading a life in this world spotless of sin, and triumphant over all temptations!

CXXIV. Having lately observed so many new authors, who pretend to give an account of the nature of God, and of the human soul, and who are usually men of no very virtuous principles, I would willingly consider, how such men came to be qualified for such a performance, and how the secret of God comes to be intrusted with them; which, David observes, was always used to be committed to another sort of men. Now it plainly appears to me, that a vicious man can have no true notion of

God ; because the knowledge of a thing, is necessary to the forming a notion of it. And no man can have the knowledge of God, but he on whom God himself shall be pleased to bestow it: for that knowledge is the consequence of faith, and faith is not naturally implanted in the mind of man ; it being solely the gift of God, conferred upon men, at such time as he thinks fit. For, if it were originally implanted in the mind, there would be no such thing as a vicious man or unbeliever ; nor yet could there be any such thing as a regenerate man ; since, if faith were natural to the soul, there would be no need of any such work, as rooting up, and new planting ; which is the laborious business of regeneration, which is the happy effect of a lively faith. How, then, should the vicious man come by this knowledge, which he neither has from nature, nor can possibly have by his own acquisition ? Besides, it is evident, that the moment God Almighty gives the knowledge of himself to any one, it makes him cease to be vicious : for he who, by faith, has obtained the knowledge of God, must immediately discover his glorious beauties and perfections ; and he who has discovered those, will find himself obliged to love God ; and he who loves God, must needs obey him ; and he who obeys God as he ought to do, is the direct contrary to a vicious man.

CXXV. Where there is no constancy of mind, there can be no constancy of happiness. Immutability is that admirable attribute, which crowns the beatitude of the Almighty. Inconstancy and

change are the great imperfections under which human nature labours, the divine nature being entirely exempt from them.

CXXVI. If happiness be necessary to man, religion is necessary in order to attain happiness. For religion is, properly, nothing else, than a right guided pursuit after happiness. We must not imagine, when we perform any duty towards God, or put up our addresses to him, that we literally do him either honour or service; but that we are doing the most reasonable thing in the world, and the most beneficial to ourselves, by which we aspire after, and acquire effectually, our greatest felicity, from the bountiful acceptance of our performances by God; to whom they are utterly unprofitable, and to whose complete and perfect sufficiency and bliss, all the united beings of the creation would not be able to make the most inconsiderable addition. We must, therefore, by no means entertain such absurd notions, as to fancy, that, in our religious duties, we are doing service to God, when we are actually doing the greatest imaginable honour and service to ourselves; whilst He is pleased to permit us to enter into any communication with him, upon which he shall vouchsafe, through his own pure bounty, to confer his favour. And, indeed, our performing any duty to God, as we ought, as well as the means of procuring and increasing it, is the consequence of his favour; since it is by his favour only, that we are induced and enabled to make any right applications to him.

CXXVII. There are two extraordinary virtues

to be learned from human imperfection. The imperfections of others, may teach us patience; the imperfections of ourselves, may teach us humility.

CXXVIII. We are not to imagine, that we do honour to Jesus Christ by believing in him; for our faith is a tribute due to his excellence: and we do ourselves honour in manifesting, by our faith in him, that discerning wisdom, by which we are led to discover the infinitely superior excellence, which was in him, above all the men that have ever lived in the world; which superiority is evident in various instances, and, particularly, in his wonderful and intimate knowledge, both of the divine and human nature. Our own experience, compared attentively with his discourses and reasonings, upon that subject, will sufficiently demonstrate to us, that no man ever had so clear an inspection into all the powers and weaknesses, motions and mutations, vices and virtues, of the mind of man, as he had; nor did ever any man understand the perfections and imperfections, the miseries and happiness, incident and belonging to human nature, in any degree equally with him; neither was any man ever able to prescribe such just rules and methods of attaining happiness, and avoiding misery, as he, to the infinite benefit and advantage of mankind, has been pleased to do. And, since we have so sensible a demonstration, by our own inward feeling of what passes in ourselves, and by our continual discoveries and observations of what passes in others, that Jesus Christ has made so lively, just, and true

a description of human nature, no reasonable man ought to doubt either his knowledge, or sincerity, in what he has discovered to us of the divine : for his truth in describing human nature, is a justification of his truth in describing the divine ; and his knowledge of the one, a justification of his knowledge of the other.

CXXIX. The chief reason why few arrive at the felicity of a clear and strong faith, seems to me to be this ; the soul is not able so to disengage itself from the objects to which its affections have united it, as to give itself up freely to the disquisition of abstracted and important truths : such is the slavery to which our vices and corruptions have betrayed us ; and such is the glorious liberty, which we can never obtain, but by the bountiful assistance of divine power ; which, by enlightening the reason, and displaying before it far more excellent and noble objects, can alone enable it to make a truer and better choice. But, whosoever is happy enough to enjoy such an illumination, must not imagine, that his reason is more easy to be kept bright, than a piece of brass or iron ; for if he neglect frequently to rub and polish it, he will soon be convinced, that it will lose its lustre. And nothing but our ignorance of the difference between a clear and sullied reason, can ever make us with patience endure the latter.

CXXX. Jesus, my Lord, have mercy upon me. I believe thee, I know thee, to be the son of the ever-living God ; not more from the miracles which

thou hast wrought, than from the words which thou hast spoken. Thy words are no less a demonstration of infinite wisdom, than thy works of infinite power ; and I most humbly implore thy favour and mercy, both as my Saviour and my God.

CXXXI. Thou great and adorable God, the complete knowledge of whom, is perfect felicity ; and even the imperfect knowledge of whom, the most desirable blessing ; enlarge and purify my soul for the contemplation of thee, that, when I consider thy incomprehensible glories, I may adore thee, in a measure proportionable to my conceptions of thee. Make my knowledge and adoration of thee to increase, every moment of my life ; and, if it please thee, raise them still higher in the last moments of it ; that, by a lively faith, humble obedience, fixed hopes, and ardent love, I may ascend to the eternal fruition of thee, in thy everlasting kingdom of glory, through Jesus Christ, my Saviour. Amen.

CXXXII. I think the mystery of the Trinity may be very well accounted for by human reason ; so far as to vindicate it from being a contradiction. But, to imagine that human reason is capable of arriving at a clear and just notion of it, is to imagine, that human reason is not human reason ; that it is neither finite nor limited, but capable of extending itself, even to the infinite extent of all truth. There is nothing more vain, than to fancy, that human reason is the measure of all truth, and that nothing can be true, but what is measured by it. We may as justly think, that a man's span is the

measure of infinite space, or the hollow of his hand the measure of all matter, as that his understanding is the measure of all truth. It is objected, that one cannot be three, nor three one : if this be affirmed of numbers, I grant it is true ; but if it be affirmed, that by granting it to be true as to numbers, it must necessarily be true as to the Trinity, I absolutely deny that affirmation ; for the case is not the same between them. And this objection is only a fallacy, which supposes two cases alike, which are not alike ; and therefore its conclusion is false. It is evident, that the number three contains three units, and that three units is more than one unit ; it is also evident, that one unit is not so much as three units, and therefore that one unit cannot be three units. Now, to make the case the same in the Trinity, and this a just confutation of it, somebody must affirm, but who that somebody is I do not know, that one essentially distinct God, may be three essentially distinct Gods ; and that three essentially distinct Gods, may be but one essentially distinct God. But nobody that believes the Trinity rightly, believes it in this manner ; and, therefore, this is a fallacious comparison, and a wrong argument. The true notion of the Trinity, as I conceive, is, that God the Father has existed from all eternity ; that God the Son has been begotten by Him from all eternity, and has eternally existed with him ; that God the Holy Ghost has, by an eternal procession, proceeded from the Father and the Son, and eternally

existed with them. But nobody imagines, that either the Son, or the Holy Ghost, were ever separated and divided from the Father; since such a separation would make three essentially distinct Gods. On the contrary, the Christian belief is, that both the Son and Holy Ghost are inseparably united to the Father; that they remain one same and indivisible substance with Him, so as with Him to make but one God. Now this is as far from a contradiction as to say, that a thousand houses are but one city, and one city is a thousand houses; that millions of drops are one stream, and that one stream is a million of drops. All the difference is, that we know, by our own perception, how thousands of houses make one city, and how millions of drops make one stream; and so on the contrary. But we do not know, because it is out of the reach of our senses, and beyond the bounds of our understanding, how the three persons of the Trinity, as we call them, are one God; or how the undivided Godhead contains the three persons in the Trinity. But, to give a yet clearer and juster instance of the matter; when we see a plant or tree, with different shoots, growing out of the same root, we think we speak properly, and so we do, when we say it is one plant or tree: and we speak as properly, when, designing to distinguish the differences of that plant or tree, we say, that the root and two shoots growing out of it are three; for there is both such a diversity and distinction, as must be numbered by three; and yet, in another

respect, there is such an unity, as can be called but one. There is such an union and connection between the root and those shoots which grow out of it, that when we conceive of them altogether, we can have no notion but of one undivided plant or tree; but, when we conceive of the root and its several shoots, as distinguished from one another, we lay aside the notion of unity, and consider them as three distinct things; and yet, this is so far from any contradiction, that our notions in both respects are very right, and agreeable to the real truth of things. Thus, it is evident we have notions of Trinity in unity without absurdity, how wittily soever some men may make an unwary and dangerous jest of it. This, in relation to the Deity, whose essence and perfection are incomprehensible, must be acknowledged to be a great mystery; a truth revealed to us, but not explained to our understandings: we have reason to believe it true, though we cannot comprehend, by our reason, after what manner it is true. We are assured, and we have the fullest reason to believe, that all those beings which shall for ever continue in the favour and presence of God, must necessarily enjoy a perfect felicity; but, to comprehend the full nature, extent, and manner of that felicity, is above the reach and capacity of our understandings; and must be so, till, by being made capable of enjoying it, we become capable of understanding it. In short, as it is not reasonable to believe very strange things, without good grounds for our belief;

so it is unreasonable, positively to conclude every thing to be false, the truth of which does not lie evidently open and level to our understandings. A wise man knows certainly many truths, which an ignorant man cannot comprehend; but the wisest of men know, by many degrees, fewer truths than they are ignorant of.

MODERATION IS VIRTUE.*

The word moderation has of late been so much in every body's mouth, that it gave me the curiosity to examine the nature of the thing represented by that word. There is, doubtless, one true original idea belonging to every singly significant word; though custom may have applied several other significations to it, different from its first and proper meaning. And it is in the labyrinth of this various acceptation of words, or rather misunderstanding of ideas, that contending parties are apt to lose themselves in endless disputes. My design, therefore, is to consider, in as few words as possible, the nature of moderation, abstracted from party and passion; what it really is, and wherein it consists. It is granted, on all hands, that moderation is a virtue: but I think that is to say too little of it; since it is the indivisible point in which all virtue centres. For all excess is vicious; and that spot only, which is free and unpossessed by excess, is the point of moderation, and the very centre of

* This dissertation was written in December. 1711.

virtue and truth ; surrounded with extremes, without partaking of them. The virtue of prudence, is moderation in judgment ; the virtue of temperance, is moderation in appetite ; the virtue of justice, is moderation in mutual dealings and intercourse amongst men ; and the virtue of fortitude, is moderation, setting just bounds and limits to fear and desire, and equally balancing the mind between timidity and rashness. I might as easily trace moderation, in all the inferior subordinate virtues, as I have done in these principal and original ones ; but this suffices to show, that moderation is the point in which all virtue resides, and that there can be no separation between them. So that, when it is required, that our moderation should be known to all men, nothing less is meant, than that we should give to the world undeniable evidences of our virtue, truth, and sincerity ; which are all comprehended in that one word moderation. But if any body imagines, that, in a contest concerning an important truth, to yield up the point, and depart from that truth, is moderation, he is infinitely mistaken ; for it is so very far from it, that it is a vicious, and, by consequence, immoderate compliance. To comply in indifferent matters, is charity and civility ; but, to comply where justice and truth are concerned, is a manifest renunciation both of the one and the other ; and men must have a care that they do not permit their virtue to be overpowered, either by their good-nature or good-breeding. Where there is a contest between two

persons, the one is apt to desire the other to be more moderate ; that is, to yield up the point in dispute : and the other, if he has more right on his side, may more reasonably and justly make that demand to him ; since it is most certain, that the adherence to justice and truth, is moderation ; and he who so adheres, is a moderate or virtuous man : and, on the contrary, he who either opposes justice and truth, or departs from them, is an immoderate or vicious one. Should a Jew press a Christian to renounce his religion, and, finding him firm to his principles, desire him to be more moderate, no man can imagine that it would be a virtuous moderation in the Christian, to renounce Christianity, and turn Jew. But, here lies the fallacy and mistake : both vice and virtue are, for want of a true distinction, indifferently attributed to moderation ; which is vulgarly and falsely taken for yielding and complying, no matter whether reasonably or unreasonably : and he who cannot oblige another to comply with his interest or passion, will always be apt to accuse him of want of moderation. But I do not wonder that moderation is more talked of than understood ; since most men's virtue lies more in their tongues, than in their affections and understanding ; and he who does not feel the influence of virtue and moderation in himself, must needs talk as ignorantly and imperfectly of it, as a blind man does of colours. But, were there more moderation in men's minds, there would be more in their manners ; more justice and integrity, more charity and generosity. And,

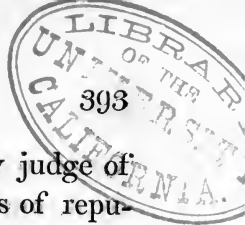
when the world is more possessed with that virtue of moderation, it will be better known, better practised, and less talked of: it will then be attended with those natural effects of unity, peace, and kindness, which it would never fail to produce, were it more real and universal. In the mean time, I take the liberty to advise all contending parties, to examine very impartially, whether, at the same time that they upbraid their adversaries, for having the mote of immoderation in their minds, they have not a beam of it lying across their own; and, if they have, to remove it as soon as they can; for, having experimentally learned to work that cure in themselves, they may more justly reprove, and more skilfully and successfully advise and assist, their neighbours. As for my own particular, I profess to be of no other party than that of moderation; which is the party of right reason and truth: yet, at the same time, I clearly foresee, that it will be my fate, though I shall never think it my misfortune, to be always on the weakest side; since power and superiority never fail to get the better of moderation; which is ever successively abandoned by all prevailing parties, and left as a poor neglected portion, for those few who value it enough, to content themselves with it even nakedly, or divested of power and advantage.

REPUTATION NO TRUE RULE OF ACTION.

One reason why men usually have such wrong notions of things, is, because they receive general

rules, which yet have many exceptions to them, without having any regard to those exceptions; or, rather it is, because they receive those rules for general ones, which are not general. For want of knowledge and judgment, they do not make right distinctions between that part of a rule which must always be the same, and other parts which are liable to variation and change. It is a great mistake amongst many people, that reputation is to be the rule of action; which is as much as to affirm, that an uncertain and variable thing is to be a certain and fixed direction; that a heap of sand, which will be scattered by the first wind, is a sufficient land-mark for travellers for ever to know their way by; that a thing which is capable of as many forms and sudden changes, as the clouds in the air, is a constant and settled rule of behaviour and action. In short, if we have no other rule of action but reputation, I must affirm, that we have no rule at all. But I think we have another, which we may securely follow and depend upon; such a one, as will keep us always in the right way, if we can but be happy enough to keep our eyes ever fixed upon it: which rule is, the united principles of right reason and religion, or rather of true Christianity, which is right reason. Here, we have a substantial rule; there, we have only the wavering shadow of one: here, we have something that will last as long as right reason lasts; there, we have something that will change as often, as the stream of men's fancies and opinions change, which is as often as the

weathercock: and those who resolve to be directed by it, must be as inconstant as the wind. Were a man always to be governed by reputation, he must change the fashion of his virtues, as often as the fashion of his clothes; otherwise he will run the hazard to be laughed at for an old-fashioned virtue, as well as for an old-fashioned coat. A foundation that is unfixed is a foundation upon sand, fit only for fools to build on. Wise men, therefore, will find another, and chuse a foundation, that has itself a foundation to rest upon; and then they know they may build securely. The true foundation of action, is the truth and rectitude of action; and the foundation of that truth and rectitude, is the eternal perfection and will of the divine nature. We are to do things because they are right, not because they are commendable; always considering, that they are not right, because they are commendable, but commendable because they are right. Wisdom, not vanity, ought to move us to virtue. We are to act for the sake of truth, in order to please God; not for the sake of praise, in order to please fools. Neither are we to satisfy ourselves, with the trifling bauble of vain reputation, but with the substantial benefit of having done our duty, and of having pleased that adorable Being, whom we are obliged to make it the whole business of our lives to please. But to come to a clearer state of this matter, without which there can be no avoiding of confusion, it is necessary to distinguish between the different notions of virtue, and the



different motives to it ; by which we may judge of the difference there is in men's notions of reputation. I will confine myself to two, viz. the heathen notion of virtue, and the Christian notion of it ; for we must not confound the one with the other : but, when we speak of virtue, we must know what virtue we mean ; or else, when men speak of reputation, we shall never know what reputation they mean. The notion of most of the celebrated heathens was, that glory was the only object fit for the pursuit of great and generous souls ; and that such designs only, were to be formed and prosecuted by them, as would procure them the most lasting, and, as they vainly enough imagined, immortal glory ; that is, the praise and applause of their actions while they lived, and the perpetuation of their fame in after-ages ; so that future generations might bestow that commendation upon their names and memories, which the present did upon their living persons. This present and future glory was the idol of the more generous heathens ; it was the ultimate good which they proposed to themselves in this life, and the only felicity for which they hoped after death : so that, the only motive of all their actions, the only incitement to their ambition, was glory and praise ; a thin diet for a rational mind to feed upon ; all the pleasure and immortality of which, was to be enjoyed in the short space of this present life only, by the help of a vain fancy, and over-heated imagination. The other notion of Christian virtue, is this, that the

principal thing towards which a wise man ought to bend his thoughts, designs, and actions, is the approbation and favour of God ; the eternal enjoyment of whom, is the true immortal glory after which he ought ambitiously to aspire. This is no vain imaginary pleasure, but a real felicity ; to be felt, tasted, and enjoyed for ever. It will not fail and vanish, when the heat of imagination is extinguished, like the pleasure of commendation and praise ; but it will be so inseparably united to our very souls and beings, that the one must last, as long as the other. This is the true virtue, the true principle of action, as well as the true rule by which it is to be regulated. When our actions are formed and finished by this rule, they will deserve praise and commendation ; and we may with assurance give it to ourselves, though all the world refuse it to us. He who has the approbation of a well-instructed, well-regulated conscience, needs no other ; if that acquits him, it is a divine acquittal, nor needs he care who condemns him. Those who walk altogether by reputation, travel in a labyrinth, amongst such a multiplicity of ways, that they never find the right one, but weary themselves in fruitless and endless labour. Among good fellows, it is a reputation to drink ; among the debauched, to be intemperate ; among the atheists, to blaspheme ; among the pickpockets, to cheat and steal ; among politicians, to deceive and circumvent ; and among heroes, to plunder and oppress. In short, every one commends what he likes best.

himself; and where there is such variety of different directors, a man who has no other knowledge of his road, will be very apt to miss it. Among the clamours of so many false reputations, the low voice of a true reputation is hardly to be heard; and, if heard, it will hardly be credited, against so strong an opposition. There are so few who value either men or actions, because they are good, that he who only considers reputation, will be apt to chuse one, that makes a loud noise. Men generally love to have their praises proclaimed, not whispered. There are not many who can have the patience to stay till the day of judgment, to receive the approbation and applause of their actions. If a man is scorched with the thirst of praise, he will strive to quench it, though it be in the first puddle; he will not take the pains to search far for a clear fountain, if muddy water be near at hand. But it may be objected, that certainly reputation is a valuable thing, since it has been accounted so by the wisest of men: neither will I deny that a just and true reputation is a most desirable thing; but I deny that it is desirable, only as it is praise and commendation; since ill actions, among many people, may procure those, as well as good ones; but it is desirable, as it is the effect of a desirable cause; it is desirable, because true merit, which, only can give a true reputation, confers it; and true merit is what every body ought to aspire after, and to be thankful to God for giving it to them, when they have it. Men ought to be truly virtu-

ous, because true virtue is in itself a desirable thing, loved by that adorable wisdom, which is the fountain of all wisdom, as well as of all virtue; and whether it is its fortune to be commended or neglected, esteemed or despised, it will not, or at least it ought not, to appear less amiable to those who admire, covet, and possess it, because they are assured it will make them approved and accepted, where approbation and acceptance is a more valuable, lasting, and substantial blessing, than even that immortal fame and glory, which is so generally and foolishly preferred before it.

“How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another; and seek not the honour that cometh of God only?”

A strong vanity, makes a weak faith;
And a strong faith, a weak vanity.

A RATIONAL ESSAY UPON THE TRINITY.

In relation to the Trinity, I would have it considered, whether unity of nature or essence, and plurality of persons, is not necessary to absolute felicity and perfection; at least, whether, according to the best conjectures of human reason about a matter so far beyond its reach, it does not seem highly probable that it is so. Infinite perfection undoubtedly belongs to the Deity; but whether that is consistent with unity of person, and a solitary existence, is what I would now consider only in a rational manner, without any regard to revelation.

We can attain to the knowledge of most of the attributes of God, even to what is equal to a demonstration, by just deductions and inferences from what we find to be in ourselves. We are sensible of some small degree of power and wisdom in ourselves ; from whence we must certainly conclude, that what we find imperfectly in such creatures as we are, must be most perfectly in the Deity ; and that, by consequence, almighty power and infinite wisdom are attributes belonging to him. Since we can, by this manner of reasoning, enter so far into the knowledge of the divine nature, as to find out many of its perfections, why may we not, by the same method, discover something of the nature of its felicity ? We agree that the felicity of friendship is one of the greatest belonging to human nature ; that an intimate affection between two friends, with a conformity of temper, thoughts, and inclinations, is a great happiness of human life ; and yet, we perceive there is an exceeding imperfection in this happiness, from the separation and division of the persons ; which necessarily obstructs that entire union, and perfect communication of thought and affection, which are requisite to a complete felicity. From hence we may reasonably infer, that the felicity of the Deity is rendered infinitely perfect by a plurality of persons, between whom there is an exact harmony of thought, of will, and of affections ; who are inseparable and indivisible, from a complete union of nature and essence, in one eternal infinite and glorious Being. As to the

number of persons necessary to supreme felicity, there is no foundation for human reason to determine any thing concerning it; and therefore we can come by revelation only to the knowledge of the number. This alone can confirm to us the former conjectures of our reason; by discovering, that a Trinity of persons united in essence, is what composes the felicity and perfection of the Deity. We may, by our reason, farther conceive concerning the eternal generation of the Son, and the eternal procession of the Holy Ghost; that since a Trinity of persons is the perfection of the Deity, the Father necessarily exists, not only eternally, but perpetually imparting his divine nature to the Son; and that both the Father and the Son eternally and perpetually exist, imparting the divine nature to the Holy Ghost. So that the Son receives his divine nature by a spiritual generation, or communication from the Father, as the Holy Ghost receives his divine nature by a spiritual procession, or communication of it from the Father and the Son. Had the existence of the Son been only from an act of the will of the Father, and the existence of the Holy Ghost only from an act of the will of the Father and the Son, we might have supposed a time before those acts of the will took place; and, by consequence, that the generation of the Son, and procession of the Holy Ghost, was in time: but, when we take it for granted, that the perfection of the Deity consists in the union of three persons in one nature or essence, we must

conclude that union to be necessary, perpetual, and eternal, as also the generation and procession to have been necessary, perpetual, and eternal. From hence it appears, wherein consists the superiority of the Father, which is in being the fountain and source of the Deity, and in communicating the divine nature to the Son, and jointly with him to the Holy Ghost; as the subordination of the Son consists in his receiving the divine nature from the Father, and the subordination of the Holy Ghost in his receiving the divine nature from the Father and the Son: and hereby it is evident, that the co-equality of the Son and of the Holy Ghost to the Father, consists in the full and complete participation and reception of the divine nature from him. Upon this foundation, we may securely worship and adore the ever-blessed Trinity in unity, one in perfect consent and harmony, one in perfect complacency and love, as well as in nature and essence, without danger of tritheism and idolatry.

I do not pretend to establish this way of reasoning, as a foundation of faith, nor do I fix my faith upon the conclusions I have drawn from reason, which can amount to no more than a rational probability. I absolutely believe those conclusions no further, than they are supported and confirmed by Scripture, as understood by the Catholic church. I only tried, for my own satisfaction, how nearly I could reconcile revelation and reason. The proposition from which all my other inferences and

conclusions seem to me clearly and naturally to flow, is what I should no otherwise regard, than as a reasonable conjecture, which might either be true or false, were it not warranted from Scripture, which declares the Godhead to exist in three persons united in one nature or essence; from whence I make no difficulty to conclude, that it is that particular mode of existence, which constitutes the perfection and felicity of the Deity. And I think I may, without presumption, affirm, that, in conjunction with infinite wisdom and almighty power, infinite harmony and love are the felicity of the Deity, and complete its perfection. In calling this a rational essay, all that I mean, is, to show, that the Trinity, as it is revealed in scripture, is not a notion absurd or contradictory to our reason; which is too frequently objected to it.

AN HUMBLE ATTEMPT, TO ILLUSTRATE THE TRUE
MEANING AND END OF THE SACRAMENT OF THE
LORD'S SUPPER.

I will not suppose, that any question will be made, whether a person, who believes the divinity of our Saviour, and acknowledges his satisfaction for the sins of mankind, who truly repents of his sins, and resolves sincerely to forsake them, and who, in obedience to our Saviour's commands, communicates in the sacrament of his body and blood, receives worthily or not.

His believing that there is no change or alteration in the elements of bread and wine after con-

secration, will not, I suppose, alter the case. If he believes, as it is most natural to believe, that our Saviour, when he said, "This is my body, this is my blood," did, by the same almighty word of power, which said, "Let there be light, and there was light," ordain and decree, that all those blessings and benefits, which he had purchased and procured for mankind, by his passion, death, and intercession, should, as long as the world continues, attend upon the sacred action, and be annexed to it; and that every individual person, who, in a just and thankful remembrance of what his Saviour had done and suffered for him, should, in obedience to his command, receive the sacrament of his body and blood, — every such person, should be made a partaker of all the blessings and benefits of his passion and death; obtaining a perfect remission of his sins, and eternal salvation through his merits and intercession, if he persevered in obedience to him: so that, according to the definition of our church, the bread and wine in this sacrament would be, most certainly, the outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace.

This notion would put an end to all the disputes about transubstantiation and consubstantiation, and would fully answer all the desirable ends and purposes of this sacrament; and, indeed, it really and truly seems to be the plain and natural meaning of the words of our blessed Saviour.

We are not to imagine, that this last injunction, of the highest endearment, between our Saviour

and his disciples, was only a barren * rite or ceremony, if I may so say, to entitle them to the same blessing of acceptance, common to all other acts of obedience and devotion ; but that these words of our Saviour, “ This is my body, this is my blood,” without his having any thought of changing the elements of bread and wine, do, by a plain interpretation, assure us, that the action of receiving should effectually be attended with a full participation of the benefits purchased, and of the atonement made for us, by his body crucified, and by his blood shed upon the cross, for the redemption of mankind.

It is infinite mercy and almighty power, that has, to the end of the world, annexed those blessings to this holy sacrament ; and it is by faith and obedience only, that we can be rendered capable of receiving them ; nor does it depend, as the Papists absurdly imagine, upon the intention of the priest, whether the communicants shall receive these blessings or not ; neither is there any occasion or reason for the repeated sacrifices of the mass. The foregoing notion can be confuted by nothing, but by plain and positive words of Scripture, which are nowhere to be found. As for inferences to be drawn from them, those which favour and support this notion, are the most just, easy, and natural, and, freeing the mind from doubts and difficulties, render this great mystery as intelligible as it is pos-

* By *barren* is only meant, void of any new or extraordinary privilege.

sible to be ; sufficiently affording to every devout communicant a rational satisfaction and comfort. When we consider how much is given, and how much is forgiven us, it cannot fail to kindle in our souls the strongest flame of love they are capable of entertaining, for each of the divine persons in the blessed Trinity ; to whom all duty, praise, and love must be for ever due.

The best preparation for the performance of this duty, is, a constant endeavour of becoming a sincere Christian : without which, all devotion is vain and ineffectual ; and with which, every religious duty will most certainly be accompanied with success and acceptance. But, since, through the exceeding weakness and imperfection of our nature, even the best of men are too often apt to be remiss in their duties, and to slacken their endeavours of pleasing God, it is most reasonable, that, when we are about to commemorate the exceeding love of our blessed Saviour, in his death and sufferings for us, we should diligently apply ourselves to repair our remissness, and strive to raise our minds and affections to the highest sense of duty and gratitude ; which is all the return we are capable of making, for these inestimable blessings we are about to receive.

The celebration of this sacrament is most fitly and solemnly performed in the church of England, and in a manner perfectly agreeable to its first institution. The elements are set apart and consecrated for that holy purpose, and prayer is made for

the fulfilling of that promise which was virtually made by the words of our blessed Saviour ; who is petitioned, that his body which was given for us, and his blood which was shed for us, may preserve our bodies and souls unto everlasting life, and that we should ever thankfully remember his infinite mercy towards us. All divine promises for mercy and blessings, though fixed and positive, yet the stated condition of our obtaining them, is by duty and prayer ; it being vain to imagine, that the greatest of benefits should be bestowed upon any, who do not earnestly covet and desire them.

TWO SERMONS,

BY

RALPH CUDWORTH, D.D.

Ευσέβει, ὦ τέκνον· ὁ γὰρ εὐσεβῶν, ἀκρῶς χριστιανίζει.

Χριστιανισμός ἐστὶ τῆς θείας φύσεως μιμησις.

S. Greg. Nyss.

‘ Thus, Moses-like, conversing with God in the mount, and there beholding his glory shining thus out upon us, in the face of Christ, we should be deriving a copy of that eternal beauty upon our own souls; and our thirsty and hungry spirits would be perpetually imbibing a true participation and image of his glory. A true divine love would wing our souls, and make them take their flight swiftly towards heaven and immortality. Could we once be thoroughly possessed and mastered with a full confidence of the divine love, and of God’s readiness to assist such feeble, languishing creatures as we are, in our essays after heaven and blessedness, we should then, finding ourselves borne up by an eternal and almighty strength, dare to adventure, courageously and confidently, upon the highest degrees of happiness, to assail the King of heaven with a holy gallantry and violence, to pursue a course of well-doing without weariness; knowing that our labour shall not be vain in the Lord, and that we shall receive our reward, if we faint not: we should work out our salvation, in the most industrious manner, trusting in God, as one ready to instil strength and power into all the vital faculties of our souls: we should “press towards the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God, in Christ Jesus, that we may apprehend that, for which also we are apprehended, of Christ Jesus.” ’

John Smith. Select Discourses.

TWO SERMONS,

BY RALPH CUDWORTH, D. D.

SERMON I.

THEY KNOW CHRIST, WHO KEEP HIS COMMANDMENTS.

1 JOHN, ii. 3, 4.

And hereby we do know, that we know him, if we keep his commandments.

He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.

WE have much inquiry concerning knowledge, in these latter times. The sons of Adam are now as busy, as ever Adam himself was, about the tree of knowledge of good and evil; shaking its boughs, and scrambling for the fruit: whilst, I fear, many are too unmindful of the tree of life. And, though there be now no cherubim, with their flaming swords, to fright men off, yet the way that leads to it, seems to be solitary and untrodden, as if there were but few that had any mind to taste of its fruit. There are many, that speak of new glimpses and discoveries of truth, of dawnings of gospel light. And no question, but God has reserved

much of this, for the very evening and sun-set of the world; for, in the latter days, “knowledge shall be increased.” But yet, I wish we could, in the mean time, see that day dawn, which the apostle speaks of, and that “day-star arise, in men’s hearts.” I wish, whilst we talk of light, and dispute about truth, that we could walk more as “children of the light.” But, if Saint John’s rule, in the text, be good, that no man truly knows Christ, but he who keeps his commandments,—it is much to be suspected, that many of us, who pretend to light, have a thick and gloomy darkness within, overspreading our souls.

There are now many large volumes and discourses, written concerning Christ; thousands of controversies discussed, infinite problems determined, concerning his Divinity, humanity, union of both together, and what not. So that our bookish Christians, who have all their religion in writings and papers, think they are completely furnished with all kinds of knowledge concerning Christ. And, when they see all their leaves lying about them, they think they have a goodly stock of knowledge and truth, and cannot possibly miss the way to heaven; as if religion were nothing but a little book-craft, a mere paper-skill.

But if Saint John’s rule here be good, we must not judge of our knowing Christ, by our skill in books and papers, but by our keeping his commandments. And that, I fear, will discover many of us, notwithstanding all this light which we boast

of round about us, to have nothing but Egyptian darkness within our hearts.

The vulgar sort think, that they know Christ enough, out of their creeds, and catechisms, and confessions of faith: and, if they have but a little acquainted themselves with these, and, like parrots, have conned the words of them, they doubt not, but that they are sufficiently instructed in all the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven. Many of the more learned, if they can but wrangle and dispute about Christ, imagine themselves to be grown great proficients in the school of Christ.

The greater part of the world, whether learned or unlearned, think, that there is no need of purging and purifying their hearts, for the right knowledge of Christ and his Gospel. But, though their lives be never so wicked, their hearts never so foul within, yet they may know Christ sufficiently, out of their treatises and discourses, out of their mere systems and bodies of divinity. Which I deny not to be useful, in a subordinate way; although our Saviour prescribes to his disciples another method, for coming to the right knowledge of Divine truths: "He that will do my Father's will, shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God." The true Christian, indeed, is not he that is only book-taught, but he, that is God-taught; he, that has "an unction from the Holy One," "that teacheth him all things;" he, that has the Spirit of Christ within him, that searcheth out the deep things of God: "For, as no man knoweth

the things of a man, save the spirit of a man, which is in him; even so, the things of God knoweth no man, but the spirit of God."

Ink and paper can never make us Christians, can never beget a new nature, a living principle in us; can never form Christ, or any true notions of spiritual things, in our hearts. The Gospel, that new law, which Christ delivered to the world, is not merely a dead letter without us, but a quickening spirit within us. Cold theorems and maxims, dry and jejune disputes, lean syllogistical reasonings, could never yet, of themselves, beget the least glimpse of true heavenly light, the least sap of saving knowledge, in any heart. All this is but the groping of the poor dark spirit of man after truth; to find it out with his own endeavours, and feel it with his own cold and benumbed hands. Words and syllables, which are but dead things, cannot possibly convey the living notions of heavenly truths to us. The secret mysteries of a Divine life, of a new nature, of Christ formed in our hearts, cannot be written or spoken, language and expressions cannot reach them: neither can they be ever truly understood, except the soul itself be kindled from within, and awakened into the life which animates them. A painter, that would draw a rose, though he may flourish some likeness of it in figure and colour, can yet never paint the scent and fragrancy; or, if he would draw a flame, he cannot put a constant heat into his colours; he cannot make his pencil drop a

sound, as the echo in the epigram mocks at him.* All the skill of cunning artizans and mechanics, cannot put a principle of life into a statue of their own making. Neither are we able to enclose in words and letters, the life, soul, and essence, of any spiritual truths, and, as it were, to incorporate it in them.

Some philosophers have determined, that virtue cannot be taught, by any certain rules or precepts. Men and books may propound some direction to us, that may engage us in a course of life, and practice, by means of which, we shall at last find virtue within ourselves, and be experimentally acquainted with it; but they cannot teach it us, like a mechanic art or trade. No, surely: "there is a spirit in man; and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth understanding." But we shall not meet with this spirit, any where but in the way of obedience: the knowledge of Christ, and the keeping of his commandments, must always go together, and be mutual causes of one another: "Hereby we know, that we know him, if we keep his commandments.

"He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him."

I come now to these words themselves; which are so pregnant, that I shall not need to force out any thing from them. I shall, therefore, only take notice of some few observations, which drop from

* 'Si vis similem pingere, pinge sonum.'

them, of their own accord; and then conclude, with some application of them to ourselves.

I. First, then, If our keeping Christ's commandments, be the right method of discovering our knowledge of Christ, then, we may safely draw conclusions concerning our state and condition, from the conformity of our lives to the will of our Redeemer.

Would we know, whether we know Christ aright, let us consider whether the life of Christ be in us. He that has not the life of Christ in him, has nothing but the name, nothing but a fancy of Christ; he has not the substance of him.* Whoso builds his house upon this foundation, not an airy notion of Christ swimming in his brain, but on Christ really dwelling and living in his heart, as our Saviour himself bears witness, he "buildeth his house upon a rock;" and when the floods come, and the winds blow, and the rain descends, and beats upon it, it shall stand impreguably. But he who builds all his comfort, upon an ungrounded persuasion, that God, from all eternity, has loved him, and absolutely decreed him to life and happiness, and seeks not for God really dwelling in his soul,—he builds his house upon a quicksand, and it shall suddenly sink, and be swallowed up: "His hope shall be cut off, and his trust shall be a spider's web; he shall lean upon his house, but it shall not stand; he shall hold it fast, but it shall not endure."

We are nowhere commanded to pry into these

* 'Qui non habet vitam Christi, Christum non habet.'

secrets; but the wholesome counsel and advice given us is this, “to make our calling and election sure.” We have no warrant in Scripture, to peep into these hidden rolls and volumes of eternity; and to make it our first object, when we come to Christ, to spell out our names in the stars; and to persuade ourselves, that we are certainly elected to everlasting happiness, before we see the image of God, in righteousness and true holiness, shaped in our hearts. God’s everlasting decree is too dazzling and bright an object, for us to set our eye upon. It is far easier and safer for us, to look upon the rays of his goodness and holiness, as they are reflected in our hearts; and there to read the mild and gentle characters of God’s love to us, in our love to him, and our hearty compliance with his heavenly will: as it is safer for us, if we would see the sun, to look upon it here below in a pail of water, than to cast up our daring eyes upon the body of the sun itself, which is too radiant and scorching for us. The best assurance that any one can have of his interest in God, is, doubtless, the conformity of his soul to God. Those Divine purposes, whatsoever they may be, are altogether unsearchable and unknowable: they lie wrapped up in everlasting darkness, and covered in a deep abyss. Who is able to fathom the bottom of them?

Let us not, therefore, make this our first attempt towards God and religion, to persuade ourselves strongly of these everlasting decrees. For if, at our first flight, we aim so high, we shall haply but

scorch our wings, and be struck back with lightning; as those giants of old were, that would needs attempt to assault heaven. And it is, indeed, a most gigantic essay, to thrust ourselves so boldly into the lap of heaven. It is a prank of Nimrod, of a mighty hunter, thus rudely to deal with God; and to force heaven and happiness before his face, whether he will or not. The way to obtain a good assurance, indeed, of our title to heaven, is not to clamber up to it, by a ladder of our own ungrounded persuasions, but to dig as low as hell, by humility and self-denial in our own hearts: and, though this may seem to be the farthest way about, yet it is, indeed, the nearest and safest way to it. We must, as the Greek epigram speaks, ascend downward, and descend upward*, if we would indeed come to heaven, or get any true persuasion of our title to it.

The most gallant and triumphant confidence of a Christian riseth safely and surely on this low foundation, that lies deep underground, and there stands firmly and steadfastly. When our heart is once turned into a conformity with the word of God, when we feel our will perfectly to concur with his will, we shall then presently perceive a spirit of adoption within ourselves, teaching us to cry, Abba, Father! We shall not then care for peeping into those hidden records of eternity, to see whether our names be written there in golden characters; no, we shall find a copy of God's

* *Αναβαινέιν κάτω, and καταβαινέιν άνω.*

thoughts concerning us, written in our own breasts. There, we may read the characters of his favour to us ; there, we may feel an inward sense of his love to us, flowing out of our hearty and unfeigned love to him. And we shall be more undoubtedly persuaded of it, than if any of those winged watchmen above, who are privy to heaven's secrets, should come and tell us, that they saw our names enrolled in those volumes of eternity. But, on the contrary, though we strive to persuade ourselves ever so confidently, that God from all eternity hath loved us, and elected us to life and happiness, — if yet, in the mean time, we entertain any iniquity within our hearts, and willingly close with any temptation, — do what we can, we shall find many a cold qualm, every now and then, seizing upon us, at approaching dangers : and, when death itself shall grimly look us in the face, we shall feel our hearts die within us, and our spirits quite faint away, though we strive to raise them, and recover them, never so much, with the strong waters* of our ungrounded presumptions. The least inward evil, willingly continued, will be like a worm, fretting the gourd of our jolly confidence, and presumptuous persuasion of God's love, and always gnawing at the root of it ; and, though we strive to keep it alive, and continually besprinkle it with some dews of our own, yet, it will be always dying and withering in our bosoms. But a good conscience within, will be always better to a Chris-

* Aqua vitæ.

tion, than “health to his navel, or marrow to his bones;” it will be an everlasting cordial to his heart; it will be softer to him than a bed of down, and he may sleep securely upon it, in the midst of raging and tempestuous seas, when the winds bluster, and the waves beat round about him. A good conscience is the best looking-glass of heaven; in which, the soul may see God’s thoughts and purposes concerning it, reflected as so many shining stars: “Hereby we know Christ; hereby we know, that Christ loves us, if we keep his commandments.”

II. Secondly, If hereby only we know, that we know Christ, by our keeping his commandments, then the knowledge of Christ does not consist merely in a few barren notions, in a form of certain dry and sapless opinions.

Christ came not into the world, to fill our heads with mere speculations; to kindle a fire of wrangling and contentious dispute, among us; and to warm our spirits against one another, with angry and peevish debates: whilst, in the mean time, our hearts remain all ice within towards God, and have not the least spark of true heavenly fire, to melt and thaw them. Christ came not to possess our brains with some cold opinions, that send down a freezing and benumbing influence upon our hearts. Christ was a master of life, not of the schools*: and he is the best Christian, whose heart beats with

* Vitæ magister, non scholæ.

the purest pulse towards heaven; not he, whose head spins out the finest cobwebs.

He that endeavours really to mortify his passions, and, in his life, to comply with that truth, which his conscience is convinced of, is nearer a Christian, though he never heard of Christ, than he, who believes all the vulgar articles of the Christian faith, and plainly denies Christ in his life.

Surely the way to heaven, that Christ has taught us, is plain and easy, if we have but honest hearts: we need not many criticisms, many school distinctions, to come to a right understanding of it. Surely Christ came not to ensnare us, and entangle us, with captious niceties; or to puzzle our heads, with deep speculations; or to lead us, through hard and craggy notions, into the kingdom of heaven. I persuade myself, that no man shall ever be kept out of heaven, for not comprehending mysteries that were beyond the reach of his shallow understanding, if he had but an honest and good heart, that was ready to comply with Christ's commandments. "Say not in thy heart, Who shall ascend into heaven?" that is, with high speculations, to bring down Christ from thence; or, "Who shall descend into the abyss beneath?" that is, with deep searching thoughts, to fetch up Christ from thence: but lo, "the word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart."

But I wish it were not the distemper of our times, to scare and fright men with opinions, and make them solicitous only about entertaining this and

that speculation, which will not render them any thing the better in their lives, or the liker unto God; whilst, in the mean time, there is no such care taken, about our keeping Christ's commandments, and being renewed in our minds, according to the image of God, in righteousness and true holiness. We say, "Lo, here is Christ," and, "Lo, there is Christ," — in these and those opinions; whereas, in truth, Christ is neither here, nor there, nor any where, but where the Spirit of Christ, where the life of Christ is.

Do we not, now-a-days, open and lock up heaven with the private key of this and that opinion of our own, according to our several fancies, as we please? And, if any one observe Christ's commandments never so sincerely, and serve God with faith and a pure conscience, yet, haply, understands not some contended-for opinions, some darling notions, he has not the right *shibboleth*, he has not the true watch-word, he must not pass the guards into heaven. Do we not make this and that opinion, this and that outward form, to be the wedding-garment; and boldly sentence to outer darkness, those who are not invested with it? Whereas, every true Christian finds the least dram of hearty affection towards God, to be more cordial and sovereign to his soul, than all the speculative notions and opinions in the world; and though he study, also, to inform his understanding aright, and free his mind from all error and misapprehensions, yet it is nothing but the life of Christ

deeply rooted in his heart, that is the chemical elixir, which he feeds upon. Had he “all faith, that he could remove mountains,” as Saint Paul speaks, had he “all knowledge, all tongues and languages,” yet he prizes one dram of love, beyond them all. He accounts him, that feeds upon mere notions in religion, to be but an airy and cameleon-like Christian. He now finds himself otherwise rooted and centred in God, than formerly, when he merely contemplated and gazed upon Him; he tastes and relishes God within himself; he has *quendam saporem Dei*, a certain savour of God; whereas, before, he did but rove and guess after Him at random. He feels himself safely anchored in God, and will not be dissuaded from enjoying God, though perhaps he skill not many of those subtilties, which others make the *alpha* and *omega* of their religion. Neither is he scared by those childish affrightments, with which some would force their private conceits upon him; he is above the superstitious dread of mere speculative opinions, as well as the superstitious reverence of mere outward ceremonies; he cares not so much for subtilty, as for soundness and health of mind. And, indeed, as it was well spoken by a noble philosopher, that, ‘without purity and virtue, God is nothing but an empty name;’* so it is as true here, that, without obedience to Christ’s commandments, without the life of Christ dwelling in us,

* *Ανευ αρετης, Θεος εναντι μου.*

whatsoever *opinion* we may entertain of him, Christ is only named by us, he is not known.

I speak not here against a free and ingenuous inquiry into all truth, according to our several abilities and opportunities; I plead not for captivating and enthralling our judgments to the dictates of men; I do not disparage the natural improvement of our faculties, by true knowledge, which is so noble and gallant a perfection of the mind. The thing, which I aim against, is, dispiriting the life and vigour of our religion, by dry speculations; and making it nothing but a mere dead skeleton of opinions, a few dry bones, tied up together, without any flesh and sinews; and misplacing, upon an eager prosecution of these opinions, all that zeal, which should be spent to better purpose, upon nobler objects.

Knowledge, indeed, is a thing far more excellent than riches, outward pleasures, worldly dignities, or any thing else in the world, besides holiness, and the conformity of our wills to the will of God; yet, our happiness consists not in knowledge, but in a certain divine temper and constitution of soul, which is far above it.

But it is a piece of that corruption, which runs through human nature, that we naturally prize truth, more than goodness; knowledge, more than holiness. We think it a gallant thing, to be fluttering up to heaven with our wings of knowledge and speculation; whereas, the highest mystery of a divine life here, and of perfect happiness here-

after, consists in nothing but mere obedience to the Divine will. Happiness is nothing but that inward sweet delight, which will arise from the harmonious agreement between our wills and the will of God.

There is nothing contrary to God in the whole world, nothing that fights against him, but self-will. This is the strong castle, that we all keep garrisoned against heaven, in every one of our hearts, which God continually layeth siege unto: and it must be conquered and demolished, before we can conquer heaven. It was by reason of this self-will, that Adam fell in paradise; that those glorious angels, those morning stars, kept not their first station, but dropped down from heaven like falling stars, and sunk into that condition of bitterness, anxiety, and wretchedness, to which they are now reduced. They all entangled themselves with the length of their own wings; they would needs will more, and otherwise, than God would will in them; and, going about to make their wills wider, and to enlarge them into greater amplitude, the more they struggled, they found themselves the faster pinioned, and crowded up into narrowness and servility: insomuch, that now they are not able to use any wings at all, but, inheriting the serpent's curse, can only creep with their bellies upon the earth. Now, our only way to recover God and happiness again, is, not to soar up with our understandings, but to destroy this self-will of ours; and then, we shall find our wings grow

again, our plumes fairly spread, and ourselves raised aloft into the free air of perfect liberty, which is perfect happiness.

There is nothing in the whole world able to do us good or hurt, but God, and our own will: neither riches nor poverty, nor disgrace nor honour, nor life nor death, nor angels nor devils; but willing or not willing, as we ought. Should hell itself cast all its fiery darts against us, if our will be right, if it be informed by the Divine will, they can do us no hurt; we have then, if I may so speak, an enchanted shield, that is impenetrable, and will bear off all. God will not hurt us, and hell cannot hurt us, if we will nothing but what God wills. Nay, then we are actuated by God himself, and the whole Divinity flows in upon us; and, when we have cashiered this self-will of ours, which did but shackle and confine our souls, our wills shall then become truly free, being widened and enlarged, to the extent of God's own will. "Hereby we know, that we know Christ indeed," not by our speculative opinions concerning him, but "by our keeping of his commandments."

III. Thirdly, if hereby we are to judge, whether we truly know Christ, by our keeping of his commandments, so that, he that saith he knoweth him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar; — then, this was not the plot and design of the Gospel, to give the world, upon what pretence soever, an indulgence to sin.

But we are too prone to make such misconstruc-

tions of the Gospel; as if God had intended nothing else by it, but to dandle our corrupt nature, and contrive a smooth and easy way for us to attain happiness, without the toilsome labour of subduing our appetites, and sinful affections: or, as if the Gospel were nothing else, but a declaration to the world, of God's engaging his affections, from all eternity, on some particular persons; in such a manner, that he would resolve to love them, and dearly to embrace them, though he never made them partakers of his image, in righteousness and true holiness; and, though they should remain under the power of all their appetites, yet they should still continue his beloved ones, and he would, notwithstanding, bring them, at last, undoubtedly into heaven. Which is nothing else, but to make the God whom we worship, the God of the New Testament, an acceptor of persons; one, who encourages that in the world, which is diametrically opposite to God's own life and being.

And, indeed, nothing is more ordinary, than to shape out such monstrous and deformed notions of God to ourselves; looking upon him, through the coloured medium of our own corrupt hearts, and having the eye of our soul tinctured, by the suffusions of our own desires. And therefore, because we mortals can fondly love and hate, and sometimes hug the vices, of those to whom our affections are engaged, and kiss their very deformities, — we are ready to shape out a deity like unto ourselves, and to fashion out such a god, as

will, in Christ at least, hug the very wickedness of the world ; and, in those that are once his own, — by I know not what fond affection, appropriated to himself, — connive at their very sins, so that they shall not make the least breach between himself and them. Some there are, who question, whether of the two be the worse idolatry, and of the deeper stain, for a man to make a god out of “ a piece of wood, and fall down unto it, and worship it, and say, Deliver me, for thou art my God,” — as it is expressed in the prophet Isaiah, — or to set up such an idol-god as this, of our own imagination, fashioned according to the similitude of our own fondness and wickedness : — and, when we should paint God with the liveliest colours that we can possibly borrow from any created being, with the purest perfections that we can abstract from them, — to draw him thus, with the black coal of our own corrupt hearts, and to make the very blots and blurs of our own souls, constitute the letters, by which we spell out his name. Thus do we, that are children of the night, make black and ugly representations of God unto ourselves, as the Ethiopians were wont to do ; copying him out, according to our own likeness, and setting up unto ourselves for a god, that which we love most dearly in ourselves, that is, our appetites and passions. But there is no such god as this, any where in the world ; but only in some men’s false imaginations, who know not, all this while, that they look upon themselves instead of God, and make an

idol of themselves, which, instead of him, they worship and adore : being so full of themselves, that, whatsoever they see round about them, even God himself, they colour with their own tincture ; like the person of whom Aristotle speaks, that, wheresoever he went, and whatsoever he looked upon, still saw his own face, represented to him, as in a glass. And, therefore, it is no wonder, if men seem naturally more devoutly affected, toward such an imaginary god as we have now described, than toward the true real God, clothed with his own real attributes ; since it is nothing but an image of themselves, with which, Narcissus-like, they fall in love. And no wonder, if they kiss and dandle such a baby-god as this ; which, like little children, they have dressed up out of the clouts of their own fond fancies, according to their own likeness, on purpose that they might play and sport with it.

But, howsoever we paint and disfigure him here below, God will ever dwell in spotless light ; he will still be circled about with his own rays of unstained and immaculate glory. And, though the Gospel be not God as he is in his own brightness, but God veiled and masked to us, God in a state of humiliation, and condescent, as the sun in a rainbow, yet, it is nothing else, but a clear and unspotted mirror of divine holiness, goodness, purity ; in which attributes, lie the very life and essence of God himself. The Gospel, is God descending into the world in our form, and conversing with us in our likeness ; that he might

allure and draw us up to God, and make us partakers of his divine form. ‘God was therefore incarnated, and made man, that he might deify us;’* that is, as Saint Peter expresses it, make us “partakers of the divine nature.” Now, I say, the very proper character, and essential tincture, of God himself, is nothing else but goodness. Nay, I may be bold to add, that God is therefore God, because he is the highest and most perfect good; and good is not therefore good, because God, out of an arbitrary will of his, would have it so. Whatsoever God doeth in the world, he doeth it as suitable to the highest goodness; the idea and fairest copy of which, is his own essence.

Virtue and holiness in creatures, as Plato well discourses in his Euthyphro, are not therefore good, because God loves them, and will have them to be accounted such; but rather, God therefore loves them, because they are, in themselves, simply good. Some of our own authors go a little further yet; and tell us, that God does not fondly love himself, because he is himself; but therefore he loves himself, because he is the highest and most absolute goodness. So that, if there could be any thing in the world better than God, God would love that better than himself: but, because he is essentially the most perfect good, therefore he cannot but love his own goodness, infinitely above all other things. And another mistake, which sometimes we make re-

* Θεός γέγονεν ἀνθρώπος, ἵνα ἡμᾶς ἐν ἑαυτῷ θεοποιήσῃ.—*S. Athanasius.*

specting God, is shaping him out according to the model of ourselves, when we make him nothing but a blind, dark, impetuous self-will, running through the world; such as we ourselves, who have not the ballast of absolute goodness to poise and settle us, are furiously actuated by.

That I may, therefore, come nearer to the subject in hand. God, who is absolute goodness, cannot love any of his creatures, and take pleasure in them, without bestowing upon them a communication of his goodness and likeness. God cannot make a Gospel, to promise men life and happiness hereafter, without being regenerated, and made partakers of his holiness. As soon may heaven and hell be reconciled, and lovingly shake hands with one another, as God can be fondly indulgent to any sin, in whomsoever it be. As soon may light and darkness be espoused together, and midnight be married to noon-day, as God can be joined in a league of friendship with any wicked soul.

The great design of God in the Gospel, is to clear up this mist of sin and corruption, with which we are here surrounded; and to bring up his creatures, out of the shadow of death, to the region of light above, the land of truth and holiness. The great mystery of the Gospel, is, to establish in the hearts of men, a god-like frame and disposition of spirit, which consists in righteousness and true holiness. And Christ, who is the great and mighty Saviour, came into the world, on purpose,

not only, to save us from fire and brimstone, but, also, to save us from our sins. Christ has, therefore, made an expiation of our sins, by his death upon the cross, that we, being thus “delivered out of the hands of” these “our” greatest “enemies, might serve God without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life.” This “grace of God, that bringeth salvation,” has therefore “appeared unto all men,” in the Gospel, that it might “teach us to deny ungodliness, and worldly lusts, and that we should live soberly, righteously, and godlily in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify to himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.” — “These things I write unto you,” says the Apostle, a little before my text, “that you sin not;” thus expressing the end of the whole Gospel, which is, not to cover sin, by spreading the purple robe of Christ’s death and sufferings over it, while it still remains in us, with all its filth and noisomeness unremoved, but to convey a powerful and mighty spirit of holiness, to cleanse us and free us from it. And this is a greater grace of God to us, than the former, which still go both together in the Gospel; first, the free remission and pardon of sin in the blood of Christ, then, the delivering us from the power of sin, by the Spirit of Christ dwelling in our hearts.

Christ came not into the world merely to cast a mantle over us, and hide all our filthy sores from God's avenging eye, with his merits and righteousness ; but he came especially to be a surgeon and physician of souls, to free us from the filth and corruption of them ; which is more grievous and burthensome, more noisome to a true Christian, than the guilt of sin itself.

Should a poor wretched and diseased creature, full of sores and ulcers, be covered all over with purple, or clothed with scarlet, he would take but little contentment in it, whilst his sores and wounds remain upon him ; and he had much rather be arrayed in rags, so that he might obtain but soundness and health within. The Gospel is a true Bethesda, a pool of grace, where such poor, lame, and infirm creatures as we are, upon the moving of God's Spirit, may descend down, not only to wash our skin and outside, but also to be cured of our diseases within. And, whatever the world thinks, there is a powerful Spirit, that moves upon these waters, the waters of the Gospel, spreading its gentle, healing, quickening wings over our souls. The Gospel is not like Abana and Pharpar, those common rivers of Damascus, that could only cleanse the outside ; it is a true Jordan, in which such leprous Naamans as we all are, “ may wash and be clean.” — “ Blessed, indeed, are they, whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered : blessed is the man, to whom the Lord will not impute sin ; ” but yet, rather blessed are

they, whose sins are like a morning cloud, and quite taken away from them. Blessed, thrice “blessed are they, that hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be satisfied: blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.”

Our Saviour Christ came, as John the Baptist tells us, “with his fan in his hand, that he might thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into his garner: but the chaff he will burn up, with unquenchable fire.” He came, as the prophet Malachi speaks, “like a refiner’s fire, and like fuller’s soap; to sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and to purify all the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness.”

Christ came, not only to write Holiness to the Lord upon Aaron’s forehead, and to put his Urim and Thummim upon his breast-plate, but, “This is the covenant, saith the Lord, that I will make with them in those days; I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.” They shall be all kings and priests unto me. “God sent his own Son, in the likeness of sinful flesh, and, by a sacrifice for sin, condemned sin in the flesh; that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.”

The first Adam, as the Scripture tells us, brought in a real defilement, which, like a noisome leprosy, has overspread all mankind: and therefore the

second Adam must not only fill the world with a conceit of holiness, and mere imaginary righteousness, — but he must really convey such an immortal seed of grace into the hearts of believers, as may prevail still more and more in them, till it have, at last, quite wrought out that poison of the serpent.

Christ, who was, in fact, Divinity dwelling in a tabernacle of flesh, and God himself immediately actuating a human nature, came into the world, to kindle here among men that divine life, which is certainly dearer to God, than any thing else whatsoever in the world ; and to propagate this celestial fire continually, from one heart unto another, until the end of the world. Neither is he, nor was he, ever absent from this spark of his Divinity kindled amongst men, wheresoever it be, though he seem, bodily, to be withdrawn from us. He is the standing, constant, inexhausted fountain of this divine light and heat, that still touches every soul that is enlivened by it, with an outstretched ray, and freely lends his beams, and disperses his influence to all, from the beginning of the world, to the end of it. “ We all receive of his fulness, grace for grace ;” as all the stars in heaven are said to light their candles at the sun’s flame. For, though his body be withdrawn from us, yet, by the lively and virtual contact of his Spirit, he is always kindling, cheering, quickening, warming, and enlivening hearts. Nay, this divine life, begun and kindled in any heart, wheresoever it be, is some-

thing of God in flesh, and, in a sober and qualified sense, Divinity incarnate ; and all particular Christians, that are really possessed of it, are so many mystical Christs.

And, God forbid, that God's own life and nature, here in the world, should be forlorn, forsaken, and abandoned, of God himself. Certainly, wherever it is, though never so little, like a sweet, young, tender babe, once born in any heart, when it crieth unto God the father of it, with pitiful and bemoaning looks imploring his compassion, it cannot chuse but move his fatherly bowels, and make them yearn, and turn towards it, and, by strong sympathy, draw his compassionate arm to help and relieve it. Never was any tender infant so dear to its human parent, as an infant new-born Christ, formed in the heart of any true believer, to God the father of it. Shall the children of this world, the sons of darkness, be moved with such tender affection and compassion towards the fruit of their bodies, their own natural offspring? And shall God, the father of lights, the fountain of all goodness, be moved with no compassion towards his true spiritual offspring, and have no regard to those sweet babes of light, engendered by his own beams in men's hearts, who, in their lovely countenances, bear the resemblance of his own face, and call him their father? Shall he see them lie fainting, and gasping, and dying here in the world, for want of nothing to preserve and keep them, but an influence from him, who first gave them life and breath?

No; hear the language of God's heart, hear the sounding of his bowels towards them: "Is it Ephraim, my dear son? is it that pleasant child? Since I spake of him, I do earnestly remember him; my bowels, my bowels are troubled for him; I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the Lord." If those expressions of goodness and tender affection, here, among the creatures, be but drops of that full ocean which is in God, how then can we imagine, that this father of our spirits should have so little regard to his own dear offspring,—I do not say to our souls, but to that, which is the very life and soul of our souls, the life of God in us, — which is nothing else but God's own self communicated to us, his own Son born in our hearts, — as that he should suffer it to be cruelly murdered in its infancy, by our sins, and, like young Hercules, in its very cradle to be strangled by those vipers? that he should see him crucified by fleshly lusts, nailed fast to the cross by invincible corruptions, pierced and gored, on every side, with the poisonous spears of the devil's temptations, and at last giving up the ghost; and yet, that his tender heart should not at all relent, nor be, all this while, impassioned with so sad a spectacle? Surely, we cannot think he hath such an adamantine breast, such a flinty nature, as this is.

What then? Must we say, that though indeed he be willing, yet he is not able, to rescue his crucified and tormented Son, now bleeding upon the cross; to take him down from thence, and save

him? Then must sin be more powerful than God; that weak, crazy, and sickly thing, more strong than the Rock of ages; and the devil, the prince of darkness, more mighty than the God of light. No, surely; there is a weakness and impotency in all evil, but a masculine strength and vigour in all goodness; and therefore, doubtless, the highest good is the strongest thing in the world. God's power, displayed in the world, is nothing but his goodness strongly reaching all things, from height to depth, from the highest heaven to the lowest hell; and irresistibly imparting itself to every thing, according to those several degrees, in which it is capable of receiving the heavenly visitant.

Have the fiends of darkness, then, those poor forlorn spirits, which are fettered and chained up in the chains of their own wickedness, any strength to withstand the force of infinite goodness, which is infinite power? Or, do they not rather skulk in holes of darkness, and fly, like bats and owls, before the approaching beams of this Sun of Righteousness? Is God powerful to kill and to destroy, to damn and to torment? And is he not powerful to save? Nay, it is the sweetest flower in all the garland of his attributes, it is the richest diadem in his crown of glory, that he is *mighty to save*: and this is far more noble and magnificent, than to be styled *mighty to destroy*. For that, except it be in a way of justice, speaks no power, but mere impotency; for the root of all power is goodness.

Or must we say, lastly, that God, indeed, when we sigh and groan towards him, is able to rescue us out of the power of sin and Satan,—but that, sometimes, to exercise his absolute authority, his uncontrollable dominion, he delights rather in plunging wretched souls down, into infernal night, and everlasting darkness? What shall we, then, make the God of the whole world? Nothing but a cruel and dreadful *Erinnys*, with curled fiery snakes about his head, and firebrands in his hands, thus governing the world? Surely this will make us, either secretly to think, that, if he must needs be such, there is no God at all in the world; or else, to wish heartily that there were none. But, doubtless, God will, at last, confute all these our misapprehensions: he will unmask our hypocritical pretences, and clearly cast the shame of all our sinful deficiencies, upon ourselves; and will vindicate his own glory, from receiving by them the least stain or blemish. In the mean time, let us know, that the Gospel now requires far more of us, than the law ever did; for it requires a new creature, a divine nature, Christ formed within us: but then, it bestows a quickening spirit, an enlivening power, to enable us to perform that which is required of us. Whosoever, therefore, truly knows Christ, the same also keepeth Christ's commandments. But “he that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.”

I have now done with the first part of my dis-

course, concerning those observations, which arise naturally from the words, and offer themselves to our acceptance. I shall, in the next place, proceed to make some general application of them all together.

Now, therefore, I beseech you, let us consider, whether we know Christ indeed: not by our acquaintance with systems and models of divinity, not by our skill in books and papers, but by our keeping Christ's commandments. All the books and writings, with which we converse, can but represent spiritual objects to our understandings; which, yet, we can never see in their own true figure, colour, and proportion, until we have a divine light within, to irradiate and shine upon them. Though there be never such excellent truths set down in words and letters, concerning Christ and his Gospel, yet they will be but unknown characters to us, until we have a willing spirit within us, that can decipher them; until, by secret whispers in our hearts, the same spirit which at first indited them, become a commentary upon them. There are many, that understand the Greek and Hebrew of the Scripture, the original languages, in which the text was written, who never understood the language of the Spirit.

There is a flesh and a spirit, a body and a soul, in all the writings of Scripture. It is but the flesh and body of divine truths, that is printed upon paper; which alone, many moths of books and libraries feed upon; many walking skeletons of knowledge, who bury and entomb truths in the liv-

ing sepulchres of their souls, and converse only with these ; men, who never did any thing else, but pick at the mere bark and rind of truths, and crack the shells of them. But there is a soul and spirit of divine truth, which could never yet be congealed into ink, which could never be blotted upon paper ; which, by a secret traduction and conveyance, passes from one soul unto another, being able to dwell or lodge nowhere, but in a spiritual being, in a living thing, because itself is nothing but life and spirit. Neither can it, where indeed it is, express itself sufficiently in words and sounds ; it will best declare and speak itself in actions : as the old manner of writing among the Egyptians was, not by words, but things. The life of divine truths is better expressed in actions, than in words, because actions are more living things than words. Words are nothing, but dead resemblances and pictures of those truths, which live and breathe in actions ; and “ the kingdom of God,” as the Apostle speaks, “ consisteth not in word,” but in life and power. ‘ Sheep do not come and bring their fodder to their shepherd, and show him how much they eat ; but, inwardly concocting and digesting it, they make it appear, by the fleece which they wear upon their backs, and by the milk which they give.’* And let not us Christians, affect only to talk and dispute of Christ, and so, measure our

* Τα πρόβατα, ου χορτον φεροντα τοις ποιμεσιν, επιδεικνυει ποσον εφαγεν, αλλα την νομην εσω πεψαντα, εριον εξω φερει και γαλα. — *Epictetus*.

knowledge of him by our words ; but let us show our knowledge concocted into our lives and actions : and, then, let us really manifest that we are Christ's sheep indeed, that we are his disciples, by that fleece of holiness which we wear, and by the fruits which we daily yield in our lives and conversations : for " herein," saith Christ, " is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit ; so shall ye be my disciples."

Let us not, I beseech you, judge of our knowing Christ, by our ungrounded persuasions, that Christ, from all eternity, hath loved us, and given himself particularly for us, without the conformity of our lives to Christ's commandments, without a real participation of the image of Christ in our hearts. The great mystery of the Gospel does not lie in Christ without us only (though we must know, also, what he has done for us) ; but the very pith and kernel of it, consists in Christ inwardly formed in our hearts.

Nothing is truly ours, but what lives in our spirits. Salvation itself cannot save us, as long as it is only without us, any more than health can cure us, and make us sound, when it is not within us, but somewhere at a distance from us ; any more, than arts and sciences, whilst they lie only in books and papers without us, can make us learned. The Gospel, though it be a sovereign and medicinal thing itself, yet, the mere knowing and believing of its history, will do us no good ; we can receive no virtue from it, till it be inwardly digested and

concocted into our souls ; till it be made ours, and become a living thing in our hearts. The Gospel, if it be only without us, cannot save us, any more than that physician's bill could cure the ignorant patient of his disease, who, when it was commended to him, took the paper only, and put it up in his pocket, but never drank the potion that was described in it.

All that Christ did for us in the flesh, when he was here upon earth, from his lying in a manger, when he was born in Bethlehem, to his bleeding upon the cross on Golgotha, will not save us from our sins, unless Christ by his Spirit dwell in us. It will not avail us to believe, that he was born of a virgin, unless the power of the Most High overshadow our hearts, and beget him there likewise. It will not profit us, to believe, that he died upon the cross for us, unless, by the mortification of all our evil affections, we be baptized into his death ; unless the old man of sin be crucified in our hearts. Christ, indeed, has made an expiation for our sins upon his cross, and the blood of Christ is the only sovereign balsam to free us from their guilt. But yet, besides the sprinkling of the blood of Christ upon us, we must be made partakers also of his spirit. Christ came into the world, as well to redeem us from the power and bondage, as to free us from the guilt, of our sins. “Ye know,” says Saint John, “that he was manifested, to take away our sins : whosoever, therefore, abideth in him, sinneth not ; whosoever sinneth, hath not

seen nor known him." Lo, the end of Christ's coming into the world! Lo, a design worthy of God manifested in the flesh!

Christ did not take all those pains, to lay aside his robes of glory, and come down hither into the world, to enter into a virgin's womb, to be born in our human shape, to be laid a poor crying infant in a manger, and, having no form or comeliness, to take upon him the form of a servant, to undergo a reproachful and ignominious life, and, at last, to be abandoned to a shameful death, a death upon the cross,—He did not do all this, I say, merely to bring a notion into the world, without producing any real, substantial effect; without changing, mending, and reforming the world; so that men should still be as wicked, and as much under the power of the prince of darkness, as they were before, only, they should not be thought so; so that they should still remain as full of all the filthy sores of sin and corruption, as before, only, they should be accounted whole. Shall God come down from heaven, and pitch a tabernacle amongst men? Shall he undertake such a vast design, and make so great a display of doing something, which, when it is all summed up, shall not, at last, amount to a reality? Surely Christ did not undergo all this, to so little purpose; he would not take all this pains for us, that he might be able, at last, to put into our hands nothing but a blank. He "was with child," he "was in pain and travail;" and hath "he brought forth nothing but wind? Hath he been

delivered of the east wind?" Has that great design, which was so long carried in the womb of eternity, now proved abortive, or else, nothing but a mere windy birth? No surely: the end of the Gospel is life and perfection; it is a divine nature; it is a godlike frame and disposition of spirit; it is to make us partakers of the image of God, in righteousness and true holiness; without which, salvation itself were but a notion.

Christ came into the world to make an expiation for our sins; but the end of this was, that we might eschew sin; that we might forsake all ungodliness and worldly lusts. The Gospel declares pardon of sin, to those that are heavy laden with it, and willing to be disburthened; to this end, that it might quicken and enliven us to new obedience. Whereas, otherwise, the guilt of sin might have detained us in horror and despair, and so have kept us still more strongly under its power, in sad and dismal apprehensions of God's wrath, provoked against us, and inevitably falling on us: but Christ has now appeared like a day-star, with most cheerful beams; nay, he is the Sun of Righteousness himself, who has risen upon the world, with his healing wings, with his exhilarating light, that he might chase away from us all those black despairing thoughts. But Christ did not rise, that we should play, and sport, and wantonize with his light; but that we should do "the work of the day" in it; that we should walk, not in our night-clothes of sinful deformity, but clad all over with the comely garments

of light. The Gospel is not great with child of a fancy, of a mere conceit of righteousness without us, hanging at a distance over us, whilst our hearts within, are nothing but cages of unclean birds, and like houses continually haunted with devils, nay, the very rendezvous of those fiends of darkness.

Holiness is the best thing that God himself can bestow upon us; either in this world, or the world to come. True evangelical holiness, that is, Christ formed in the hearts of believers, is the very cream and quintessence of the Gospel. And, were our hearts sound within, were there not many thick and dark fumes, which arise from thence, and cloud our understandings, we could not easily conceive the substance of heaven itself, to be any thing else but holiness, freed from those encumbrances, which ever clogged and accloyed it here; neither should we wish for any other heaven, besides this. But many of us are like those children, whose stomachs are so vitiated by some disease, that they think ashes, coal, mud-wall, or any such trash, more pleasant, than the most wholesome food. Such sickly and distempered appetites have we about these spiritual things, hankering after I know not what vain shows of happiness, whilst, in the mean time, we neglect that, which is the only true food of our souls, which is able to nourish them unto everlasting life.

Grace is holiness militant; holiness, encumbered with many enemies and difficulties, which it ever fights against, and manfully acquits itself. And

glory is nothing else, but holiness triumphant; holiness, with a palm of victory in her hand, and a crown upon her head. ‘God himself’ cannot make me happy, if he be only without me, and unless he vouchsafe a participation of himself, and his own likeness, into my soul.* Happiness is nothing but the releasing and unfettering of our souls from all narrow, scant, and particular good things; and the espousing of them to the highest and most universal good, which is not this or that particular good, but goodness itself: and this is the same thing, which we call holiness. With which, because we ourselves are so little acquainted, for the most part ever courting its mere shadow, therefore, we have such low, abject, and beggarly conceits of it; whereas, it is, in itself, the most noble, heroical, and generous thing, in the world. For I mean by holiness, nothing else but God stamped and printed on the soul. And we may please ourselves with what conceits we will; but, so long as we are void of this, we do but dream of heaven, and I know not what fond paradise; we do but blow up and down, an airy bubble of our own fancies, which rises out of the froth of our vain hearts; we do but court a painted heaven, and woo happiness in a picture, whilst, in the mean time, a true and real hell will absorb our souls into it, and will soon make us sensible of solid woe, and substantial misery.

Divine wisdom has so ordered the frame of the

* ‘Deus ipse, cum omni sua bonitate, quatenus extra me est, non facit me beatum, sed quatenus in me est.’

whole universe, that every thing should have a certain proper place, a fit receptacle for it. Hell is the sink of all sin and wickedness. The strong magic of nature pulls and draws every thing, continually, to that place which is suitable to it, and to which it belongs. So, all heavy bodies press downwards, towards the centre of our earth, drawn in by its attraction. In like manner, hell, where-soever it is, will, by strong sympathy, pull in all sin, and magnetically draw it to itself. While true holiness is always breathing upwards, and fluttering towards heaven, striving to embosom itself with God: and it will, at last, undoubtedly be conjoined with him; no dismal shades of darkness can possibly stop it in its course, or bear it back.* Nay, we do but deceive ourselves with names. Hell is nothing but the orb of sin and wickedness, that hemisphere of darkness, in which all evil moves; and heaven is the opposite hemisphere of light, the bright orb of truth, holiness, and goodness. And, in this life, we actually instate ourselves in the possession of one or other of them. Take sin and disobedience out of hell, and it will presently clear up into light, tranquillity, serenity, and shine out into a heaven. Every true saint carries his heaven about with him, in his own heart; and hell, that is without, can have no power over him. He might safely wade through hell itself, and, like the three children, pass through the midst of that fiery fur-

* Ὡς αἰεὶ τὸ ὁμοίον ἀγεί θεὸς εἰς τὸ ὁμοίον.

nace, and yet not at all be scorched with its flames. He might walk through the valley of the shadow of death, and yet fear no evil.

Sin is the only thing in the world, that is contrary to God. God is light, and that is darkness. God is beauty, and that is ugliness and deformity. All sin is direct rebellion against God ; and, with what notions soever we sugar it, and sweeten it, yet God can never smile upon it, he will never make a truce with it. God declares open war against sin, and bids defiance to it ; for it is a professed enemy to God's own life and being. God, who is infinite goodness, cannot but hate sin, which is purely evil. Sin is, in itself, but a poor, impotent, and crazy thing ; nothing but straitness, poverty, and nonentity ; so that, of itself, it is the most wretched and miserable thing in the world, and needs no farther punishment, besides itself. Divine vengeance beats it off, still further and further from God ; and, wheresoever it is, will be sure to scourge it and lash it continually. God and sin can never agree together.

That I may, therefore, yet come nearer to ourselves. This is the message, which I have now to declare unto you, that " God is light, and in him is no darkness at all : if we say, that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth." Christ and the Gospel are light, and in them there is no darkness at all. If you say, that you know Christ and his Gospel, and yet keep not Christ's commandments, but

dearly hug your private darling corruptions, you are liars, and the truth is not in you ; you have no acquaintance with the God of light, nor the Gospel of light. If any of you say, that you know Christ, and have an interest in him, and yet, as I fear too many do, still nourish ambition, pride, vain-glory, within your breasts ; harbour malice, revengefulness, and cruel hatred to your neighbours, in your hearts ; eagerly scramble after sordid pelf, and make the strength of your parts and endeavours serve that blind mammon, the god of this world ; if you wallow and tumble in the filthy puddle of fleshly pleasures, or if, in your lives, you aim only at selfish ends, and make interest the compass by which you sail, and the star by which you steer your course, looking at nothing higher or more noble than yourselves, — if these things be so, then deceive not yourselves ; you have neither seen Christ, nor know him ; you are deeply incorporated, if I may so speak, with the spirit of this world ; and have no true sympathy with God and Christ, no fellowship at all with the Father and the Son.

And, I beseech you, let us consider : are there not many of us, who pretend much to Christ, that are plainly, in our lives, as proud, ambitious, vain-glorious, as any others ? Are there not many of us, as much under the power of unruly passions, as cruel, revengeful, malicious, censorious as others ? Many, that have our minds as deeply engaged in the world, and as much envasalled to riches, gain, profit, those great admired

deities of the sons of men, and their souls as much overwhelmed and sunk, with the cares of this life? Do not many of us, as much give ourselves to the pleasures of the flesh, and, though not without regrets of conscience, yet, every now and then, secretly soak ourselves in them? Are there not many of us, who have as deep a share, likewise, in injustice and oppression, in vexing the fatherless and the widows? I wish it may not prove some of our cases, at that last day, to use such pleas as these unto Christ in our behalf: ‘Lord, I have prophesied in thy name; I have preached many a zealous sermon for thee; I have kept many a long fast; I have been very active for thy cause in church, in state; nay, I never made any question, but that my name was written in thy book of life:’—when yet, alas! we shall receive no other return from Christ but this: “I know you not; depart from me, ye workers of iniquity.” I am sure, there are too many of us, who have long pretended to Christ, and yet, make little or no progress in true Christianity, that is, in holiness of life; men who ever hang hovering, in a twilight of grace; who never seriously put ourselves forward, into clear day-light, but esteem that glimmering *crepusculum* which we are in, and like that faint twilight, better than broad, open, meridian splendour: whereas, “the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.” I am sure there are many of us, who are perpetual dwarfs, in our spiritual stature;

like those silly women, laden with sins, and led away by strange desires, who are "ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth;" who are not now one jot taller in Christianity, than we were many years ago; but have still as sickly, crazy, and unsound, a temper of soul, as we had long before.

Indeed, we seem to do something: we are always moving and lifting at the stone of corruption, which lies upon our hearts, but yet we never stir it, or at least never roll it off from us. We are sometimes a little troubled with the guilt of our sins, and then, we think we must thrust our desires out of our hearts; but afterwards, we sprinkle ourselves over with I know not what holy water, and so, are contented to let those desires, still abide quietly within us. We every day truly confess the same sins, and pray against them; and yet, we still commit them as much as ever, and lie as deeply under the power of them. We have the same water to pump out, in every prayer; and still we let the same leak in again upon us. We make a great deal of noise, and raise a great deal of dust with our feet; but we do not move from off the ground, on which we stood, we do not at all go forward. Or, if we do sometimes make a little progress, we quickly lose again the ground which we had gained; like those upper planets in the heaven, which, as the astronomers tell us, sometimes move forward, sometimes quite backward, and sometimes perfectly stand still; have their stations

and retrogradations, as well as their direct motions. As if religion were nothing else, but a dancing up and down upon the same piece of ground, and making several motions and friskings on it; and not a sober journeying, and travelling onwards, toward some certain place. We do and undo; we weave sometimes a web of holiness, but then we let our passions come, and undo and unravel all again.* Like Sisypheus in the fable, we roll up a mighty stone, with much ado, sweating and tugging up the hill; and then we let it go, and tumble down again unto the bottom; and this is our constant work. Like those Danaides, whom the poets speak of, we are always, by our prayers, duties, and performances, filling water into a sieve, which still runs out, as fast as we pour it in.

What is it, that thus cheats us, and gulls us of our religion? That makes us thus constantly tread the same ring and circle of duties, where we make not any progress forward, and how far soever we go, we are still never the nearer to our journey's end? What is it, which thus starves our religion, and makes it look like those kine in Pharaoh's dream, ill-favoured and lean-fleshed, no colour in its face, no blood in its veins, no life nor heat in any of its members? What is it, that thus be-dwarfs us in our Christianity? By what low, sordid, unworthy principles do we act, which thus hinder our growth, and make us stand at a stay, and keep us always at the very porch and entrance, where

* *Penelopes telam texere.*

we first began? Is it a sleepy, sluggish conceit, that it is enough for us, if we be but once in a state of grace, if we have but once stepped over the threshold; that we need not take so great pains, to travel any farther? Or is it another damping, choaking, stifling opinion, that Christ has done all for us already without us, and nothing more needs to be done within us? No matter how wicked we are in ourselves, for we have holiness without us; no matter how sickly and diseased our souls are within, for they have health without them. Why may we not as well be satisfied and contented, to have happiness too without us, to all eternity, and so ourselves for ever continue miserable? “Little children, let no man deceive you; he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as He is righteous: but he that committeth sin, is of the devil.” I shall therefore exhort you, in the wholesome words of Saint Peter: “Give all diligence, to add to your faith, virtue; and to virtue, knowledge; and to knowledge, temperance; and to temperance, patience; and to patience, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly-kindness; and to brotherly-kindness, charity: for, if these things be in you, and abound, they make you, that ye shall neither be barren, nor unfruitful, in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.” The Apostle still goes on, and I cannot leave him yet: “But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see far off, and hath forgotten, that he was once purged from his old sins. Wherefore, the rather, brethren, give diligence to make

your calling and election sure ; for, if ye do these things, ye shall never fall." Let us not only talk and dispute of Christ, but let us indeed " put on the Lord Jesus Christ." Having those " great and precious promises," which he hath given us, let us strive to be made " partakers of the divine nature, escaping the corruption that is in the world through lust ;" and, being begotten again, to a lively hope of enjoying Christ hereafter, " let us purify ourselves, even as he is pure."

Let us really declare, that we know Christ, that we are his disciples, by our keeping his commandments ; and, among the rest, that commandment especially, which our Saviour Christ himself commends to his disciples, in a peculiar manner : " This is my commandment, that ye love one another, as I have loved you ;" and again, " These things I command you, that ye love one another." Let us follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord. Let us put on, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering, forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any, even as Christ forgave us : and above all these things, let us put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness. Let us in meekness instruct those that oppose themselves, if God, peradventure, will give them repentance, to the acknowledging of the truth ; that they may recover themselves out of the snares of the devil, who are taken captive by him

at his will. Beloved, let us love one another ; for love is of God, and whosoever loveth, is born of God, and knoweth God."

O divine love ! the sweet harmony of souls ! the music of angels ! the joy of God's own heart ! the very darling of his bosom ! the source of true happiness ! the pure quintessence of heaven ! that which reconciles the jarring principles of the world, and makes them all chime together ! that which melts men's hearts into one another ! See how Saint Paul describes it, and you cannot chuse but have your affections enamoured towards it : " Love envieth not, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil, rejoiceth not in iniquity ; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things." I may add, in a word, it is the best-natured thing, the best-complexioned thing, in the world. Let us express this sweet harmonious affection, in these jarring times : that so, if it be possible, we may tune the world into better music. Especially in matters of religion, let us strive, with all meekness, to instruct and convince one another. Let us endeavour to promote the Gospel of peace, the dove-like Gospel, with a dove-like spirit. This was the way, by which the Gospel at first was propagated in the world : Christ " did not cry, nor lift up his voice in the streets ; a bruised reed he did not break, and the smoking flax he did not quench " ; and yet, " he brought forth judgment unto victory."

He whispered the Gospel to us, from mount Sion, in a still voice ; and yet the sound thereof went out quickly, throughout all the earth. The Gospel, at first, came down upon the world gently and softly, like the dew upon Gideon's fleece ; and yet, it quickly penetrated quite through it : and, doubtless, this is still the most effectual way to promote it further. Sweetness and ingenuousness will more command men's minds, than passion, sourness, and severity ; as the soft pillow sooner breaks the flint, than the hardest marble. Let us follow truth in love* ; and of the two, indeed, be contented rather to miss conveying a speculative truth, than to part with love. When, by the strength of truth, we would convince men of any error, let us withal pour the sweet balm of love upon their heads. Truth and love are the two most powerful things in the world ; and, when they both go together, they cannot easily be withstood. The golden beams of truth, and the silken cords of love, twisted together, will draw men forward with a sweet violence, whether they will or not.

Let us take heed, lest we sometimes call that zeal for God, and his Gospel, which is nothing else but our own tempestuous and stormy passion. True zeal is a sweet, heavenly, and gentle flame, which makes us active for God, but always within the sphere of love. It never calls for fire from heaven, to consume those who differ a little from us in their apprehensions. It is like that kind of

* Αληθευειν εν αγαπη.

lightning, which the philosophers speak of, that melts the sword within, but sings not the scabbard : it strives to save the soul, but hurts not the body. True zeal is a loving thing, and makes us always active to edification, and not to destruction. If we keep the fire of zeal within the chimney, in its own proper place, it never does any hurt ; it only warms, quickens, and enlivens : but if once we let it break out, and catch hold of the thatch of our flesh, and kindle our corrupt nature, and set the house of our body on fire, it is no longer zeal, it is no heavenly fire, it is a most destructive and devouring thing. True zeal is a soft and gentle flame *, which will not scorch one's hand ; it is no predatory or voracious thing : but carnal and fleshly zeal is like the spirit of gunpowder set on fire, which tears and blows up all that stands before it. True zeal is like the vital heat in us, that we live upon, which we never feel to be angry or troublesome ; but, though it gently feed upon the radical oil within us, that sweet balsam of our natural moisture, yet it lives lovingly with it, and maintains that by which it is fed : but that other furious and distempered zeal, is nothing else but a fever in the soul. To conclude, we may learn what kind of zeal it is that we should make use of, in promoting the Gospel, by an emblem of God's own, given us in the Scripture ; those fiery tongues, which, on the day of Pentecost, sat upon the apostles, which sure were harmless flames ; for we cannot

* Ignis lambens.

read that they did any hurt, or that they did so much as singe a hair of their heads.

I will therefore shut up this advice, with that of the Apostle : “Let us keep the unity of the Spirit, in the bond of peace.” Let this soft and silken knot of love, tie our hearts together ; though our heads and apprehensions cannot meet, as indeed they never will, but always stand at some distance from one another. Our zeal, if it be heavenly, if it be true vestal fire kindled from above, will not delight to tarry here below, burning up straw, and stubble, and such combustible things, and sending up nothing but gross and earthy fumes to heaven ; but it will rise up, and return back, pure as it came down, and will ever be striving to carry up men’s hearts to God along with it. It will be occupied, about the promoting of those things only, which are unquestionably good ; and, when it moves in the irascible way, it will quarrel with nothing but sin. Here let our zeal busy and exercise itself ; every one of us beginning first, at our own hearts. Let us be more zealous than ever we have yet been, in fighting against our inordinate desires, in pulling down these strong holds of sin and Satan, in our hearts. Here let us exercise all our courage and resolution, all our manhood and magnanimity.

Let us trust in the almighty arm of our God, and doubt not but he will as well deliver us from the power of sin in our hearts, as preserve us from the wrath to come. Let us go out against these uncircumcised Philistines, I mean our appetites

and passions, not with shield or spear, not in any confidence of our own strength, but in the name of the Lord of hosts; and we shall prevail, we shall overcome: "for greater is he that is in us, than he that is in them. The eternal God is our refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms; he shall thrust out all enemies from before us; and he shall say, Destroy them." We shall enter the true Canaan, the good land of promise, "that floweth with milk and honey," the land of truth and holiness. "Wherefore, take unto you the whole armour of God, that you may be able to withstand. Let your loins be girt about with truth; have on the breast-plate of righteousness; and let your feet be shod with the preparation of the Gospel of peace. Above all, take the shield of faith, whereby ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked; and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God." And lastly, be sure of this, that ye "be strong in the Lord only, and in the power of his might."

There are some, who dishearten us in this spiritual warfare, and would make us let our weapons fall out of our hands, by working in us a despair of victory. There are some evil spies, who weaken the hands and hearts of the children of Israel, and bring an ill report upon that land, which we are to conquer, telling of nothing but strange giants, the sons of Anak, there, whom we shall never be able to overcome: "The Amalekites

dwell in the south ; the Hittites, Jebusites, Amorites, in the mountains ; and the Canaanites by the sea-coast ;” huge armies of tall invincible desires : “ We shall never be able to go against this people ;” we shall never be able to prevail against our corruptions. Hearken not unto them, I beseech you, but hear what Caleb and Joshua say : “ Let us go up at once, and possess it, for we are able to overcome them ;” not by our own strength, but by the power of the Lord of hosts. There are, indeed, sons of Anak there ; there are mighty giant-like hosts, with whom we are to grapple ; nay, there are principalities and powers too, that we are to oppose : but the great Michael, the Captain of the Lord’s host, is with us ; he commands in chief for us, and we need not be dismayed. “ Understand therefore this day, that the Lord thy God is he, which goeth before thee as a consuming fire ; he shall destroy these enemies, and bring them down before thy face.” If thou wilt be faithful to him, and put thy trust in him, as the fire consumeth the stubble, and as the flame burneth up the chaff, so will he destroy thy inordinate desires : their root shall be rottenness, and their blossom shall go up as the dust.

But let us take heed, that we be not discouraged, and, before we begin to fight, despair of victory : for, to believe and hope well in the power of our God, and in his strength, will be half a conquest. Let us not think holiness in the hearts of men, here, in the world, is a forlorn, forsaken, and out-

cast thing from God, and that he hath no regard for holiness ; wherever it is, though never so small, if it be but hearty and sincere, it can no more be cut off and discontinued from God, than a sun-beam here upon earth, can be broken off from its intercourse with the sun, and be left alone amidst the mire and dirt of this world. The sun may as well discard its own rays, and banish them from itself into some region of darkness, far remote from it, where they shall have no dependence upon it, — as God can forsake and abandon holiness in the world, and leave it a poor orphan thing, that shall have no influence from Him to preserve and keep it. Holiness, wherever it be, is something of God ; it is an efflux from him, that always hangs upon him, and lives in him : as the sun-beams, although they gild this lower world, and spread their golden wings over us, yet they are not so much here, where they shine, as in the sun, from whence they flow. God cannot draw a curtain between himself and holiness, which is nothing but the splendour and shining of himself ; he cannot hide his face from it, he cannot desert it in the world. He that is born of God, shall overcome the world, and the prince of this world too, by the power of God in him. Holiness is no solitary neglected thing ; it has stronger confederacies, greater alliances, than sin and wickedness. It is in league with God and the universe ; the whole creation smiles upon it : there is something

of God in it, and therefore it must needs be a victorious and triumphant thing.

Wickedness is a weak, cowardly, and guilty thing, a fearful and trembling shadow. It is the child of ignorance and darkness; it is afraid of light, and cannot possibly withstand its power, nor endure the sight of its glittering armour. It is allied to none but wretched, forlorn, and apostate spirits, who do what they can, to support their own weak and tottering kingdom of darkness, but are only strong in weakness and impotency. The whole polity and commonwealth of devils, is not so powerful as one child of light, one babe in Christ; they are not able to quench the least smoking flax, to extinguish one spark of grace. Darkness is not able to make resistance against light, but ever, as it comes, flies before it. But if wickedness invite the society of devils, so that those cursed fiends most readily apply themselves to it, and offer their service to feed and encourage it, because it is their own life and nature, their own kingdom of darkness, which they strive to enlarge, and to spread its dominions, — shall we therefore think, that holiness, which is so nearly allied to God, has no good genius in the world to attend upon it, to help it, and encourage it? Shall not the kingdom of light be as true to its own interest, and as vigilant for its self-enlargement, as the kingdom of darkness? Holiness is never alone in the world: God is always with it, and his loving Spirit ever as-

sociates and joins itself to it. He, that sent it into the world, is with it, as Christ speaketh of himself: "The Father hath not left me alone, because I do always those things that please him." Holiness is the life of God, which, wheresoever it is, he cannot but feed and maintain: and, as devils are always active to encourage evil, so we cannot imagine, but that the heavenly host of blessed angels above, are busily employed in the promoting of that, which they love best, that which is dearest to God, whom they serve, — the life and nature of God in the soul. "There is joy in heaven, at the conversion of one sinner;" heaven gladly takes notice of it; there is a choir of angels, that sweetly sings the epithalamium of a soul divorced from sin and Satan, and espoused unto Christ. What, therefore, the wise man speaks concerning wisdom, I shall apply to holiness: "Take fast hold of holiness, let her not go, keep her, for she is thy life: keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life," and of death too. Let nothing be esteemed by thee, of greater consequence and concernment, than what thou doest and actest, how thou livest. Nothing without, can make us either happy or miserable; nothing can either defile, or hurt us, but what goes out from us, what springs and bubbles up out of our own hearts. We have dreadful apprehensions of the flames of hell without us; we tremble, and are afraid, when we hear of fire and brimstone; whilst, in the mean time, we securely nourish within our

own hearts a true and living hell.* The dark fire of our appetites and passions consumes our bowels within, and miserably scorches our souls; and we are not troubled at it. We do not perceive how hell steals upon us, whilst we live here. And as for heaven, we only gaze abroad, expecting that it should come to us from without, but never look for the beginnings of it to arise within, in our own hearts.

But, lest there should yet haply remain any prejudice against that, which I have all this while heartily commended to you, “true holiness,” and the “keeping of Christ’s commandments,” as if it were a legal and a servile thing, that would subject us to a state of bondage, I must here needs add a word or two, either for the prevention, or removal, of that prejudice. I do not, therefore, mean by holiness, the mere performance of the outward duties of religion, coldly acted over as a task; nor our habitual prayings, hearings, fastings, multiplied one upon another, though these be all good, as subservient to a higher end; but I mean an inward soul and principle of divine life, which inspirits all these; which enlivens and quickens the dead carcæse of all outward performances whatsoever. I do not here urge the “dead law of outward works,” which indeed, if it be alone, subjects us to a “state of bondage;” but the inward law of the Gospel, the “law of the spirit of life,” than which, nothing can be more free and in-

* Et cæco carpimur igni.

genuous: for it does not act by principles without us, but is an inward self-moving principle, living in our hearts.

The first, though it work us into some outward conformity to God's commandments, and so has a good effect upon the world,—yet we are, all this while, but like dead instruments of music, that sound sweetly and harmoniously, only when they are struck and played upon from without by the musician's hand, who has the theory and law of music living within himself.

But the second, the living law of the Gospel, the “law of the Spirit of life” within us, is, as if the soul of music should incorporate itself with the instrument, and live in the strings, and make them, of their own accord, without any touch or impulse from without, dance up and down, and warble out their harmonies.

They, that are actuated only by an outward law, are but like *neurospasts*, or those little puppets, that skip nimbly up and down, and seem to be full of quick and sprightly motion; whereas, they are, all the while, moved artificially by certain wires and strings from without, and not by any principle of motion from themselves within: or else, they are like clocks and watches, which go pretty regularly for a while, but are moved by weights and plumbets, or some other artificial springs, which must be every now and then wound up, or else they cease.

But they, who are actuated by the new law of the Gospel, by the “law of the Spirit,” have an inward

principle of life in them, which, from its own centre, puts forth itself, freely and constantly, into all obedience to the will of Christ. This new law of the Gospel, is a kind of musical soul, informing the dead organs of our hearts; which makes them, of their own accord, delight to act harmoniously, according to the rule of God's word.

The law, of which I speak, is a law of love; the most powerful law in the world: and yet it frees us, in a manner, from all law without us, because it makes us become a law unto ourselves. The more it prevails in us, the more it eats up and devours all other laws without us; just as Aaron's living rod swallowed up those rods of the magicians, which were made only to counterfeit a little life. Love is, at once, a freedom from all law, a state of purest liberty; and yet a law, too, of the most constraining and indispensable necessity.

The worst law in the world is the "law of sin, which is in our members;" which keeps us in a condition of most absolute slavery, when we are wholly under the tyrannical commands of our passions. This is a cruel Pharaoh indeed, who sets his hard task-masters over us, and makes us wretchedly drudge in mire and clay.

The law of the letter without us, sets us in a condition of a little more liberty, by restraining us from many outward acts of sin; but it does not disenthral us from the power of sin in our hearts.

But the "law of the Spirit of life," the Gospel law of love, puts us into a condition of most pure

and perfect liberty ; and whosoever really entertains this law, has “ thrust out Hagar ” quite, he has “ cast out the bond-woman and her children ; ” from henceforth Sarah, the free-woman, shall live for ever with him, and she shall be to him a mother of many children ; her seed shall be “ as the sand of the sea-shore for number,” and “ as the stars of heaven.” Here is evangelical liberty, here is Gospel freedom, when “ the law of the Spirit of life, in Christ Jesus, hath made us free from the law of sin and death ; ” when we have a liberty *from* sin, and not a liberty *to* sin : for our Lord and Master hath told us, that “ whosoever committeth sin, is the servant of it.”

He that lies under the power and vassalage of his base appetites, and yet talks of Gospel freedom, is but like a poor condemned prisoner, who, in his sleep, dreams of being set at liberty, and of walking up and down wheresoever he pleases, whilst his legs are, all the while, locked fast in fetters and irons. To please ourselves with a notion of Gospel-liberty, while we have not a Gospel-principle of holiness within, to free us from the power of sin, is nothing else, but to gild over our bonds and fetters, and to fancy ourselves the inmates of a golden cage. There is a straitness, slavery, and narrowness, in sin : sin crowds and crumples up our souls, which, if they were freely spread abroad, would be as wide and as large as the whole universe.

No man is truly free, but he that has his will enlarged, to the extent of God’s own will, by

loving whatsoever God loves, and nothing else. Such an one does not fondly hug this and that particular created good thing, and envasal himself unto it; but he loves every thing that is lovely, beginning at God, and descending down to all his creatures, according to the several degrees of perfection in them. He enjoys a boundless liberty, and a boundless sweetness, according to his boundless love. He enclaspeth the whole world within his outstretched arms; his soul is as wide as the whole universe, as large as “yesterday, to-day, and for ever.” Whosoever is once acquainted with this disposition of spirit, he never desires any thing else; and he loves the life of God in himself, dearer than his own life. To conclude this, therefore; if we love Christ, and “keep his commandments, his commandments will not be grievous to us; his yoke will be easy, and his burthen light:” it will not put us into a state of bondage, but of perfect liberty. For, that is most true of evangelical obedience, which the wise man speaks of wisdom: “her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace: she is a tree of life, to those that lay hold upon her; and happy are all they, that retain her.”

I will now shut up all, with one or two considerations, to persuade you further to the keeping of Christ's commandments.

First, from the desire which we all have, of knowledge. If we would indeed know divine truths, the only way to come to this, is by keeping

Christ's commandments. The grossness of our apprehensions in spiritual things, and the many mistakes, which we make about them, proceed from those dull and foggy steams, which rise up from our foul hearts, and becloud our understandings. If we but heartily complied with Christ's commandments, and purged our hearts from all gross and sensual affections, we should not then look about for truth, wholly without ourselves, and enslave ourselves to the dictates of this and that teacher, and hang upon the lips of men; but we should find the great eternal God, inwardly teaching our souls, and continually instructing us, more and more, in the mysteries of his will; and from within us "should flow rivers of living water." Nothing puts a stop and hindrance to the passage of truth in the world, but the carnality of our hearts, the corruption of our lives.

It is not wrangling disputes, and syllogistical reasonings, that are the mighty pillars, which underprop truth in the world: if we would but underset it with the holiness of our hearts and lives, it should never fail. Truth is a prevailing and conquering thing; and would quickly overcome the world, did not the earthiness of our dispositions, and the darkness of our false hearts, hinder it. Our Saviour Christ bids the blind man wash off the clay, that was upon his eyes, in the pool of Siloam, and then he should see clearly; intimating this to us, that it is the earthiness of men's affections, which darkens the eye of their

understandings in spiritual things. Truth is always ready and near at hand, if our eyes were not closed up with mud, if we could but open them to look upon it. Truth always waits upon our souls, and offers itself freely to us, as the sun offers its beams to every eye, that will but open, and let them shine in upon it. If we could but purge our hearts from that filth and defilement, which hangs about them, there would be no doubt at all of truth's prevailing in the world. "For truth is great, and stronger than all things: all the earth calleth upon truth, and the heaven blesseth it; all works tremble at it. The truth endureth, and is always strong; it liveth and conquereth for evermore. She is the strength, kingdom, power, and majesty, of all ages. Blessed be the God of truth."

Secondly, if we desire a true reformation, as some would be thought to do; let us begin, by reforming our hearts and lives, by keeping Christ's commandments. All outward forms and models of reformation, though they be never so good in their kind, yet they are of little worth to us, without this inward reformation of the heart. Tin, or lead, or any baser metal, if it be cast into never so good a mould, and made up into never so elegant a figure, yet it is but tin or lead still; it is the same metal, that it was before. If adulterate silver, with much alloy or dross, have never so current a stamp, yet it will not pass, when the touchstone tries it. We must be reformed within, with a spirit of fire, and a spirit of burning, to

purge us from the dross and corruption of our hearts, and to refine us as gold and silver; and then, we shall be reformed truly, and not before. When this once comes to pass, then shall Christ be set upon his throne indeed; then, “the glory of the Lord shall overflow the land;” then, we shall be a people acceptable unto him, and as mount Sion, which he dearly loved.

SERMON II.

THE CHRISTIAN'S VICTORY, OVER SIN, THE LAW,
AND DEATH.

1 COR. xv. 57.

*But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory, through
our Lord Jesus Christ.*

CHRIST'S resurrection, which the Apostle treats of in the former part of this chapter, is one of the main and principal articles of our Christian faith. For, though Christ, by his death upon the cross, made a propitiatory sacrifice for the world, yet it was his resurrection only, which manifested his death to be effectual and available for that end, and evidenced its acceptance with God. For, if the grave had detained Christ, and held him prisoner, this would have been an argument, that the debt, for which he was committed to that dark dungeon, was not yet paid, nor satisfaction made; for, "if Christ be not raised, your faith is in vain, ye are yet in your sins." But now, death and the grave having delivered up Christ out of their custody, his resurrection is an undoubted argument, that they had no more to lay to his charge, as he was a surety and undertaker for mankind; but the debt which

was owing to the law and divine justice, was in the court of heaven fully acquitted and discharged. For “ Christ was delivered for our sins, and rose again for our justification.”

And, though Christ's other miracles ought to have conciliated belief to his doctrine from the Jews ; yet, his resurrection from the dead (foretold by himself, and really accomplished) added to all the rest, was a most undoubted and unquestionable confirmation of his prophetical ministry. For if it were supposed (as the Jews of old, and the Talmudists of later times, maliciously calumniated our Saviour Christ), that a mere wizard or magician should have appeared, and not only have done many miracles, by Beelzebub and the powers of darkness, but also have foretold, that, after he had been put to death, he should rise again, and have given this as a further sign to confirm his prophecy, as our Saviour did*, it could never be conceived, that Divine Providence should suffer such an impostor miraculously to rise again, in so remarkable a manner, and so often to appear before the eyes of so many spectators, and at last visibly to ascend up to heaven. Because this would have been an invincible temptation to mankind ; it being not imaginable, what greater assurance than this, heaven itself could give, to confirm and seal a prophet, and persuade the world, that what he did was by the finger of God, and not by magical imposture. And therefore, it is observable, that, though a good

* Matt. xii. 39.

while after our Saviour's time, when the Jews had forfeited that peculiar Providence which watched over them, a certain counterfeit Messias, one David El-Roy, was permitted to do several strange and miraculous things by magic and witchcraft, if the Jewish relations be true; yet, when he gave this for a sign to the Persian king, to prove himself the Messias, that after he was beheaded by him, he should rise again, he plainly discovered his imposture, to the great disappointment of the deluded Jews, who, as Maimonides writes*, in vain expected his resurrection a good while after.

Moreover, if Christ had not risen again after death, the world would not have had sufficient ground to trust and believe in him as a Saviour. Saint Austin reckoned it as great a miracle as any that Christ ever did upon earth, that the world should be brought off to believe in a crucified Saviour. For to worship יהתלוי, as the Jews by way of disgrace call our Saviour, or τὸν ἀνασκολοπιζόμενον, in Lucian's language, one that was hanged, for a God, and to believe in him, could not but seem a monstrous and prodigious thing, both to Jews and Gentiles; and, certainly, it would never have been brought to pass, had there not been unquestionable assurance given, of Christ's resurrection from the dead. For who would be so sottish as to believe in a dead Saviour, and to expect help and assistance from him, that had not been able to help himself, and, therefore, had given no proof that he was

* In *Iggereth Teman*.

able to help others? Nay, from him, that, to all human appearance, had now no being at all? Upon which account, the Psalmist upbraids the sottish heathen, that “they ate the sacrifices of the dead.” Wherefore, it is observable, in the Gospel, that, when Christ was now dead, and buried in his sepulchre, the hope and expectation of his disciples, who had formerly believed in him, lay, as it were, entombed in the same sepulchre with him. And then the two disciples, that went to Emmaus, could only say, “We trusted, that this had been he, which should have redeemed Israel.” But afterwards, when they were able, upon good grounds, to affirm, that the Lord was risen indeed, then, their faith revived anew, and mounted up higher than ever, and grew triumphant in their hearts.

Again, there was another excellent design in Christ's resurrection from the dead, which the Apostle pursues largely also in this chapter. Namely, to give the world assurance of a life after death, and of a blessed immortality, to be enjoyed by all true believers and followers of Christ. Christ, by his resurrection, has “abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light,” as the Apostle speaks*, or, as the church sings in that divine anthem, ‘After he had overcome the sharpness of death, he opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers.’ The reasons of philosophy, which prove the soul's immortality, though firm and demonstrative in

* 2 Tim. i. 10.

themselves, are, to vulgar apprehensions, so thin and subtile, that they glide away, and leave no such palpable impressions behind them, as can be able sufficiently to bear up against that heavy weight of gross infidelity, which continually sinks down the minds of men to a distrust of such high things, as are above the reach of sense. Neither are these considerations any longer of force, than men can actually attend to the strength and coherence of the demonstration; and, when that actual attention, which is operose and difficult, is taken off, then the truth itself, like a spectre or apparition, suddenly vanishes away, and men question with themselves afterwards, whether there were any such thing, or no. Such thin and evanid things are philosophical speculations about the high mysteries of faith and religion. But Christ's raising of the self-same body which was laid in the sepulchre, and afterwards appearing in it often to his disciples, gave such evident assurance of the soul's immortality and life after death, as must needs strike more strongly upon vulgar minds, and make more palpable impressions on them, and be always of more present and ready use, than any philosophical reasons and demonstrations.

And the Scripture is, in this particular, very harmonious, and agreeable to itself; for, as in the Old Testament, it makes the original of death's entrance into the world to be the sin and disobedience of the first Adam, who was of the earth, earthy; so, in the New Testament, it attributes the recovery of

life and immortality to the meritorious obedience of the second Adam, who was the Lord from heaven, heavenly ; who, by his death, vanquished and destroyed death. For, as Samson, who was a type of our Saviour, when he was besieged by the Philistines in the city of Gaza, rose up at midnight, and pulled up the gates of the city, and the posts, and laying them upon his shoulders, carried them up to the top of the hill ; in like manner, Christ our Lord, when he was environed and encompassed by death, after he had been awhile detained under its custody, ascended victoriously out of the power of the grave, and carried the gates of hell and death, upon his shoulders, along with him, triumphantly, into heaven. He slighted and dismantled that mighty garrison, whose walls were stronger than brass, and whose gates harder than adamant ; determined, that it should no longer be a prison, with doors and bars to shut up those that believe in Him, but an open and free passage, and a broad highway to life and immortality. He is “ the resurrection and the life,” and “ he that believeth in him, though he were dead, yet shall he live.” For, “ he that liveth, and was dead, and is alive for evermore, even he hath the keys of hell and of death.”

But, that at which I chiefly aim, concerning the resurrection and ascension of Jesus into heaven, is this ; that by, and after it, he was made Lord and Christ, King and Saviour, and Sovereign of his church. Not that Christ's humanity was not al-

ways hypostatically united to the Divinity ; but because the economical kingdom of Christ, as mediator, according to the Scripture calculation, seems not to commence, till after the state of humiliation ; and so, begins its epocha from Christ's resurrection, or his exaltation to sit at God's right hand in heaven. " Let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ." — " Jesus whom ye slew, and hanged on a tree, him hath God exalted on his right hand, to be a prince and a Saviour." — " Who humbled himself, and became obedient to the death of the cross ; wherefore God hath highly exalted him, and given him a name above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow ; and, that every tongue shall confess, that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." And that article of our creed, concerning Christ's sitting at God's right hand in heaven, signifies to us thus much ; that Christ, after his resurrection and ascension into heaven, hath all power given unto him, both in heaven and in earth, all things being made subject to him, " excepting Him only, that hath put all things under him." He being, for the comfort of his church and members here upon earth, according to his humanity, made God's vicegerent, and seated in his Father's throne ; and having a mediatorial kingdom bestowed upon him, that shall continue, " till he hath put down all authority and power, and hath subdued all enemies under his feet ;" and

then, hath delivered up this economical kingdom to God the Father, "that God may be all in all."

And this is an unspeakable consolation, which the Christian religion affords us; and a most gracious condescension of the all-wise God. That, forasmuch as we, who dwell in these houses of clay, are far removed from the pure and abstracted Deity, and infinitely disproportioned to it, there should be such a divine contrivance set on foot, that we should have one of our own flesh and blood, who was in all things tempted like unto us, and had experience of all our difficulties and calamities; who demonstrated his infinite love, in laying down his life for us, and therefore we cannot doubt, that he has a most tender sympathy and fellow-feeling with us, in all our infirmities; I say, that we should have such an one, exalted to God's right hand, and invested with all authority and power, both in heaven and earth, that he might administer all things for the good of his church and members, and supply them in all their wants and necessities. Which consideration must needs be far more comfortable, cheering, and reviving, to every true Christian, than it was to the sons of Jacob, when they went down to Egypt to buy corn and provision for their necessities, to think, that Joseph their brother was made lord of all the land.

But this is wholly eluded and evacuated by those high-flown spiritualists of these latter times, who slight and reject the letter of the New Testament, as a mean and carnal thing; and will acknowledge

no other death and resurrection of Christ, no other ascension and sitting at God's right hand, nay, no no other day of judgment, nor resurrection of the body, but what is mystical and allegorical. Thus, they not only impudently slur the Gospel, according to the history and the letter, in making it no better than a romantic legend, or a mere Æsopic fable, that contains a good moral * under it; but also plainly defeat the counsel of God, against themselves and mankind, by antiquating Christianity, and by introducing in its room old paganism again, disguised under a few canting phrases of Scripture language. For, though Moses had a veil over his face, though there were many obscure umbrages and allegories in the law, (the children of Israel being then not able to bear the brightness of that evangelical truth that shone under them;) yet now, under the Gospel, "we do all, with open face, behold as in a glass, the glory of the Lord" nakedly represented to us, being "changed into the same image, from glory to glory."

But, to let these pass, and still to improve our former meditation further; let us, in the next place, consider, that Christ, who received all this power after his resurrection and ascension, did not receive it in vain and to no purpose; either taking no notice of our human transactions here below, as having removed his pavilion too far from us, into those regions of light and glory; or else, remaining an idle spectator, and not concerning or

* *Επιμυθιον.*

interesting himself, in the issues of our human affairs. Which will be so much the more improbable, if we consider what the Scripture and experience tells us; that the devil and apostate spirits are perpetually active and busy, in promoting the concernments of the kingdom of darkness. And therefore, doubtless, he, whom God hath made the shepherd and bishop of our souls, can never be so regardless of his office, nor so careless of his flock, and tender lambs, committed to his charge, as to suffer those cruel wolves to prey upon them at pleasure; and to have no pity at all for them, nor to extend his watchful providence over them, whom once he vouchsafed to redeem with his own precious blood. No, certainly; he, who waded through so many difficulties and agonies for us, in the days of his flesh; he, who “bore our griefs and carried our sorrows;” he, who was “wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities;” who did sweat drops of blood in the garden, and was nailed to the cross for us in Golgotha; he cannot so easily forget those, whom he has so dearly bought, nor suffer all that power with which, for the good of his church, God has invested him, to lie by him idle and unemployed.

But, to the end that there might not be the least ground of suspicion, or distrust, concerning this particular, left in the minds of men, Christ, after his ascension into heaven, gave us a sensible demonstration, both of his kingly power, and of his watchful care and providence over his church, that

he would not leave them orphans, and destitute of all assistance, — by sending down his Holy Spirit upon his disciples, on the day of Pentecost, in a visible and miraculous manner: “ This Jesus hath God raised up, of which we are all witnesses: therefore, being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which you now see and hear.” And verily, if there had been no news heard of our Lord and Saviour Christ, after he ascended above the clouds out of his disciples’ sight; no real and visible demonstration of his existence, power, and providence over his church; — the distrustful hearts of men would have been too prone to suspect, that the pretence of an invisible kingdom, at God’s right hand above, had been no better than a mere dream, an airy and fantastic notion; and they would have been too ready to have called in question, the truth of all his other miracles, his resurrection and ascension, witnessed only by his own disciples; and to have surmised, that those several apparitions of his, which we read of after his death, had been nothing else but spectres, or phantasms, like the vulgarly-believed apparitions of the ghosts of men in airy bodies. But the sensible and miraculous pouring out of the Holy Ghost upon his disciples, after his ascension into heaven, was a palpable confirmation of all Christ’s other miracles, of the validity of his meritorious death and passion, of the truth of his resurrection

and ascension; and gives most comfortable assurance to all believers, to the world's end, that, though his bodily presence be withdrawn from them, yet he has not left his church utterly forlorn, and destitute of all assistance; but that his Spirit, the holy Comforter, continues to be present amongst them, as his vicegerent, to assist them for all the holy purposes of the Gospel, to the world's end. Now, the principal effects of Christ's Holy Spirit, which are to be hoped for and expected by every true believer and private Christian, are comprized by the Apostle under three heads, here in the text, as consisting in a threefold victory, over a threefold enemy. "The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law: but thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ:"

1. A victory over sin, as that which is the cause of death.

2. A victory over the law, as that which aggravates the guilt, and exasperates the power of sin.

3. Lastly, A victory over death, the fruit and consequence of sin.

First, therefore, There is *a victory over sin*, to be obtained in and through Christ.

Some there are, who will acknowledge no other victory over sin, but an external one; that, by which it was conquered for us, sixteen hundred years since, by Christ upon the cross; where he "spoiled principalities and powers, and made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in

it,”* and where he “redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us.”† And, doubtless, this was one great end of Christ’s coming into the world, to make a propitiatory sacrifice for the sins of mankind: not only, that he might, thereby, put a period to those continually repeated and ineffectual sacrifices of brute beasts, and the offering of the blood of bulls and goats, which could not take away sin, nor propitiate his Divine Majesty; but also, that he might, at once, give a sensible demonstration, both of God’s high displeasure against sin, and of his placableness and reconcileableness to sinners returning to obedience; and, therefore, to that end, that the despair of pardon might not hinder any from repentance and amendment of life, he promulgated free pardon and remission of sins, through his blood, to all those who should repent and believe the Gospel.

But it is a very unsound and unwholesome interpretation of this salutary undertaking of Christ in the Gospel, that its ultimate end was to procure remission of sin, and exemption from punishment only, to some particular persons still continuing under the power of sin, and to save them, at last, *in* their sins, that is, with a mere outward and carnal salvation; it being a thing utterly impossible, that those undefiled rewards of the heavenly kingdom should be received and enjoyed, by men in their unregenerate and unrenewed nature.

* Col. ii. 15.

† Gal. iii. 13.

For what is this else, but to make Christ the grand patron of the kingdom of darkness; and to suppose that God may be bribed and corrupted, by sacrifice and intercession, to a partial connivance, and fond indulgence of men in their sins, to all eternity? Or else, to insinuate, that there is no other evil at all in sin, but in respect only of that outward punishment consequent upon it? Which is to destroy the nature and reality of sin, and to make it nothing but a mere name or fancy; as if good and evil, just and unjust, had no reality in nature, but depended only upon arbitrary laws, enforced by outward punishments, or mere opinions: and so were mere factitious, or else fictitious and imaginary things. If either of which opinions were true, then indeed, remission of sin, and exemption from punishment, would quite take away all the evil of sin.

But, if sin be not a mere name or fancy; if it have in it a real and intrinsical evil, greater than that of outward punishment, then, certainly, it cannot be so transcendent a happiness, as some men carnally conceit, to have an impunity in sinning to all eternity; and the effecting of this impunity should not be thought the only fit undertaking for the Son of God to engage in, the only one which would deservedly entitle him the Saviour of mankind. For that of Socrates in Plato must needs be true,* that, in those who are not incorrigible and

* Τον ἀδικούντα μη δίδοναι δίκην, πάντων μεγίστον τε καὶ πρῶτον κακὸν εἶναι.

incurable, it is the greatest evil that can possibly befall them, to continue in wickedness unpunished; and the greatest kindness which they can receive, by the lesser evil of punishment and castigation, to be cured of the greater evil of sin. For, as the same philosopher speaks, chastisement and correction is the natural remedy and cure of wickedness;* which our Saviour confirms, when he said, “As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten:” and surely the remedy is not worse than the disease.

Wherefore, it was so far from being the ultimate end of Christ’s undertaking, to die for sin that men might securely live in it, that, on the contrary, the death of Christ was particularly intended as an engine to batter down the kingdom of sin and Satan, and to bring men effectually to God and righteousness, as the Scripture plainly witnesses: “His own self bare our sins, in his body, on the tree, that we, being dead to sin, might live to righteousness.”† The death of Christ conducing to this great end, not only as it was exemplary, and hieroglyphically instructed us, that we ought to take up the cross likewise, and follow our crucified Lord and Saviour, suffering in the flesh, and ceasing from sin; but also, as, in a most lively manner, it demonstrates God’s high displeasure against sin, and its malignant nature; which could not otherwise be expiated, than by the blood of that innocent and immaculate Lamb, the only-begotten Son of God; and, lastly, as the hope of

* *Ιατρική της πονηρίας δίκη.*

† 1 Pet. ii. 24.

pardon and free remission of sin, in the blood of Christ, for the truly penitent, might invite and animate men to cheerful and vigorous endeavours against sin.

Others there are, who tell us, that there is, indeed, something farther aimed at in the Gospel, than the bare remission of sins; that it is, however, nothing else, but the imputation of an external righteousness, or another's inherent holiness, which is made ours, to all intents and purposes, as completely, as if we ourselves had been really and perfectly righteous; and this, upon no other condition or qualification required, except that simply of mere faith, scrupulously prescinded from all holiness and sanctification. A laying hold or apprehending only, as they use to phrase it, of this external and imputed righteousness; that is, the merely believing and imagining it to be ours: which kind of faith, therefore, is but the imagination of an imagination; or of that, which really is not; and, as Pindar calls man, the very dream of a shadow.*

For, though this be pretended by some, to be spoken only of justification, as contradistinct from sanctification, the latter of which they conceive must by no means have any conditional influence upon the former, — yet it will unavoidably extend to the taking away of the necessity of inherent righteousness and holiness, and all obligation to it: upon which very account it is so highly acceptable, because, under a specious show of modesty and

humility, it exceedingly gratifies men's hypocrisy and carnality. For he that is thus completely justified, by the imputation of a mere external righteousness, must needs have, *ipso facto*, a right and title, by that imputation, to heaven and happiness, without holiness; for "whom he justifieth, them he also glorifieth." Neither can any thing be required inherently in them, where all inherency is perfectly supplied by imputation. And, though it be pretended, that sanctification will spontaneously follow after, by way of gratitude, — yet this is likely to prove but a very slippery hold, where it is believed, that gratitude itself, as well as all other graces, is already in them by imputation. Neither can it be reasonably thought, that true holiness should spring by way of gratitude or ingenuousness, from such a principle of carnality, as makes men so well contented with a mere imaginary righteousness.

But this opinion, as it makes God, in justifying, to pronounce a false sentence, and to conceive of things otherwise than they are, and to do that, which himself hath declared to be abominable, to justify the wicked, in a forensic sense; and as it is irreconcilable to those many passages of scripture, which assure us, that God will render to every man according to his works; so, it also takes away the necessity of Christ's meritorious and propitiatory sacrifice, for the remission of sins: for, where a complete righteousness is imputed, there is no sin at all to be pardoned. And, lastly, it vainly supposes righteousness and holiness to be mere fan-

tastical and imaginary things ; for, otherwise, it were no more possible, that a wicked man should be made righteous, by another's righteousness imputed, than that a sick man should be made whole, by another's imputed health. " If a brother or sister be naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be you warmed, and be you filled ; notwithstanding you give them not those things, which are needful for the body ; what doth it profit ? Even so, what doth it profit, my brethren, if a man say he hath faith [or imputed righteousness], and have not works ? [that is, real and inherent righteousness, or inward regeneration] can such a faith [that is, imagination or imputation] save him ?" Certainly, no more than mere words can clothe a naked man's back, or feed a hungry man's belly, or warm and thaw him whose blood is frozen and congealed in his veins. Nay, it is no more possible for a man to be made holy, than to be made happy, by mere imputation, which latter, few men would be contented with ; and, were it not for their hypocrisy, they would be as little contented with the former ; and it would as little please them, to be just only in opinion, as happy only in opinion,* to use Tully's expression against the Epicureans. Nay, since it is most certain, that the greatest part of our happiness consists in righteousness and holiness, it will unavoidably follow, that, if we have no other than an imputative righteousness, we

* *Opinione tantum justi : opinione tantum beati.*

can have no other than an imputative happiness ; a mere imaginary heaven, which will little please us, when we feel ourselves to be in a true and real hell.

But it is not our intention here, to quarrel about words and phrases, as if Christ's meritorious satisfaction might not be said to be imputed, to those that repent and believe the gospel for remission of sins ; much less to deny, what the holy Scripture plainly asserts, that true and living faith, which worketh by love, which is the very essence of the new creature, or regenerate nature, is imputed, or accounted for righteousness, under the gospel dispensation ; where God will proceed, not according to legal rigour and severity, with his fallen creatures, but according to that equity, and *Ἐπιείκεια*, which the philosopher tells us is the truest justice. But our only design is, to caution against that Antinomian error, which is too often insinuated, under the notion of imputed righteousness : as if there were no necessity of inherent righteousness, and a real victory over sin, in order to salvation, but that an imputed or imaginary one might serve the turn. Which error springing up very early amongst the Gnostic Christians, Saint John gives a very seasonable antidote against it : “ Little children, let no man deceive you ; he that doth righteousness, is righteous, even as He is righteous :” and, “ He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.” To which purpose, is that also in his

first chapter: "This is the message which we have heard of him, and declare to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: but, if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin." Wherefore, the same apostle, tells us of overcoming the wicked one, and of overcoming the world, by our faith in Christ. And in the Apocalypse he propounds, from Christ himself, divers remarkable promises to him that overcometh: "That he shall eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God: That he shall not be hurt of the second death: That he shall have the hidden manna, and a white stone with a new name written in it, which no man knoweth, save he that receiveth it: That he will give him the morning-star: That he shall be clothed in white raiment, and his name shall not be blotted out of the book of life: That he shall be a pillar in the temple of God: and, That he shall sit with Christ in his throne, as he overcame, and sat down with his Father in his throne." The condition of all which promises being "overcoming," we may well conclude from thence, that there is a real, and not an imaginary victory only, to be obtained over the power of sin, as well as the guilt of it.

Nay, it is true, and very observable, that those places, which are usually quoted as the found-

ation of an imputed righteousness, in some other sense than that which we before mentioned, are, indeed, no otherwise to be understood than of a real inward righteousness, wrought or infused by the Spirit of Christ. As that principal one: "Yea doubtless, and I count all things loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord; that I may win him, and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is of the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith." Where Christ, whom the apostle desires to win, and to be found in; and the righteousness, which is through the faith of Christ; and the righteousness, which is of God through faith, — are no external imputed righteousness, but the real inward righteousness of the new creature, wrought by the Spirit of Christ through faith, which is opposed here to our own righteousness, and the righteousness which is of the law; that is, to the righteousness of outward works, done by our own natural power, according to the letter of the law, in our unregenerate state; for so the following words explain the meaning: "that I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; if by any means I might attain to the resurrection of the dead." And this same inward and real righteousness is often elsewhere called Christ, and the new man, that is said to be in us, and which we are exhorted to put on, not

by conceit or imagination only, but by real conformity to his nature, and participation of his spirit.

And whereas the magnifiers of free grace in an Antinomian sense, and the decriers of inherent righteousness, commonly conceive, — that the free grace of God consists in nothing but either in the pardon of sin and exemption from punishment, or in the imputation of an external holiness, and accounting men just freely, without any condition but only the mere believing of this, that they are so accounted; and that faith is no otherwise considered in the gospel, than in order to the believing of this imputation; and that our own works, when they are undervalued, comparatively to grace and faith, are to be taken for all inherent righteousness and holiness, even the new creature itself: that all these conceptions are errors, as it might be abundantly proved from sundry other places of Scripture, so it may sufficiently appear from this one: “God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love, wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved,) and hath raised us up together. That, in the ages to come, he might show the exceeding riches of his grace, and his kindness towards us in Christ Jesus. For, by grace are ye saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus, unto good works.” For, when we are here said to be saved by grace, it is plain,

that the apostle means by saved, inwardly quickened and sanctified : *σώζεσθαι* (says Grotius well here) is *purgari a vitiis* : which inward sanctification is here attributed to God's free grace, and denied to ourselves and to works ; the meaning of which is, that it is not effected by our own works (whether of outward morality, or legal ceremonies), done by our natural power in the unregenerate state, but, by the quickening and enlivening spirit of Christ, inwardly creating us anew. And, lastly, faith is plainly made the instrument of this inward sanctification, wrought, not by our own works, but by the grace and spirit of Christ. Whence we may well conclude, that the true object of the Christian faith, is, not only the blood of Christ, shed upon the cross, for the remission of sin ; but, also, the renewing spirit of Christ, for the inward conquering and mortifying of sin, and for the quickening or raising of us to an heavenly life.

And I dare be bold to say, that the inward sense of every true and sincere-hearted Christian, in this point, speaks the same language with the Scripture. For a true Christian, that has any thing of the life of God in him, cannot but earnestly desire an inward healing of his sinful maladies and distempers, and not an outward hiding and palliation of them only. He must needs passionately long more and more, after a new life and nature, and the divine image more fully formed in him ; insomuch, that if, without it, he might be secured from the pains of hell,

he could not be fully quieted and satisfied with such security. It is not the effects and consequence of sin only, the external punishment due unto it, from which he desires to be freed ; but from the intrinsic evil of sin itself, from the plague of his own heart. As he often meditates with comfort, upon that outward cross, to which his Saviour's hands and feet were nailed for his sins ; so he impatiently desires to feel the virtue of that inward cross of Christ also, by which, the world may be crucified to him, and he unto the world ; and to experience the power of Christ's resurrection within him, still to raise him further unto newness of life. Neither will he be more easily persuaded to believe, that his sinful desires, the malignity and violence of which he feels within himself, can be conquered without him, than that an army here in England, can be conquered in France or Spain. He is so deeply sensible of the real evil, which is in sin itself, that he cannot be contented, to have it only histrionically triumphed over. And to fancy himself covered all over, with a thin veil of mere external imputation, will afford little satisfactory comfort unto him, that hungers and thirsts after righteousness, and is weary and heavy laden with the burthen of sins, and does not desire to have his inward maladies hid and covered only, but healed and cured. Neither can he be willing to be put off till the hour of death, for a divorce between his soul and sin ; nor easily persuaded, that, though sin should rule and reign in him all his life long, yet

the last parting groan, that shall divide his soul and body asunder, may have so great an efficacy, as, in a moment also, to separate all sin from his soul.

But, that we may not seem here, either to beat the air in generals and uncertainties, or, by an indiscreet zeal, to countenance those conceited and high-flown enthusiasts of latter times, who, forgetting that example of modesty given us by the blessed apostle, — “Not as though I had already attained, or were already perfect. But this one thing I do; forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press towards the mark,” — boldly arrogate to themselves such an absolute perfection, as would make them not to stand in need of any Saviour, nor to be cleansed by the blood of the Lamb, which, accordingly, they allegorize into a mystical sense, — we must, therefore, declare, that we speak not here of inherent righteousness, and of a victory over sin, in a legal or pharisaical sense, but in such an evangelical sense, as yet, notwithstanding, is true and real.

The first degree of which, is a principle of new life, infused into the soul by the spirit of Christ through faith, (which the apostle calls the seed of God, *) inclining it to love God and righteousness, as a thing correspondent to its own nature; and enabling it to act freely and ingenuously in the ways of God, out of a living law written upon the

* 1 John, iii. 9.

heart, and to eschew sin as contrary to a vital principle. For the true gospel-righteousness, which Christ came to set up in the world, does not consist merely in outward works, whether ceremonial or moral, done by our own natural power, in our unregenerate state, but in an inward life and spirit, wrought by God. Which those very philosophers seemed in a manner to acknowledge, who denied that virtue could be taught by outward rules and precepts, like an art or trade; and Aristotle himself, also, when he inclines to think, that men's being good, depends upon some extraordinary divine influence and assistance. Which I the rather take notice of, because some late pretenders to philosophy have profanely derided this doctrine, after this manner, as if it made good thoughts and virtuous dispositions to be POURED and BLOWN into men by God. But there is a second degree of victory over sin, which every true Christian ought not only to look upon as possible, but also to endeavour after, and ceaselessly to pursue; which is "such a measure of strength in the inward man," and such a degree of mortification or crucifixion of our sinful lusts, as that a man will not knowingly and deliberately do any thing, that his conscience plainly tells him is a sin, though there be never so great temptations to it.

Whether or no this, or any thing farther, be that evangelical perfection, which was the mark that St. Paul pressed towards, and which he seems mystically to call the "resurrection from the dead," I leave

it to others to make a judgment of. But doubtless, they, that have attained to such a principle of new life, and such a measure of inward strength, as is already mentioned, that is, to the perfection of unfeigned sincerity, may, notwithstanding the irregularities of the first motions, violent assaults, and importunities of temptations, sudden incursions, and obreptions, sins of mere ignorance and inadvertency, (which are all washed away in the blood of Christ) in a true evangelical sense, be said to have attained to a victory over sin.

Wherefore, I demand, in the next place, Why it should be thought impossible, by the grace of the gospel, and the faith of Christ, to attain to such a victory over sin? For sin owes its original to nothing else but ignorance and darkness: every wicked man is ignorant. And, therefore, in that sense, another maxim of the Stoics may have some truth, also, that men sin against their will; because, if they knew that those things were indeed so hurtful to them, they would never do them. Now, we all know, how easily light conquers darkness, and, upon its first approach, makes it fly before it, and, like a guilty shade, seeks to hide itself from it, by running round about the earth. And certainly, the light of God, arising in the soul, can with as much ease scatter away the night of sinful ignorance before it. For truth has a cognation with the soul; and falsehood, lies, and impostures, are no more able to make resistance against the power of truth breaking forth, than darkness is able to dispute with

light. Wherefore, the entrance in of light upon the soul, is half a conquest over our sinful inclinations.

Again, though sin have had a long and customary possession in the soul, yet, it has no just title, much less a right of inheritance. For sin is but a stranger and foreigner in the soul, an usurper and intruder into the Lord's inheritance. Sin is no nature, as Saint Austin and others of the Fathers often inculcate, but an adventitious and extraneous thing; and the true and ancient nature of the soul of man, suffers violence under it, and is oppressed by it. It is nothing else, but the preternatural state of rational beings; and, therefore, we have no reason to think it must needs be perpetual and unalterable. Is it a strange thing, that, by the hand of a skilful musician, a jarring instrument should ever be set in tune again? Doubtless, if an instrument of music were a living thing, it would be sensible of harmony as its proper state, and abhor discord and dissonancy as a thing preternatural to it. The soul of man was harmonical as God at first made it; till sin, disordering the strings and faculties, put it out of tune, and marred the music of it: but, doubtless, that great *Harmos-tes*, who tunes the whole world, and makes all things keep their times and measures, is able to set this lesser instrument in tune again. Sin is but a disease and dyscrasy in the soul; righteousness is its health and natural complexion; and there is a propensity in the nature of every thing, to return to its proper state, and to cast off what-

ever is heterogeneous to it. And some physicians tell us, that medicaments are but subservient to nature, by removing obstructions and impediments; but nature itself, and the inward Archæus, released and set at liberty, works the cure. Bodies, when they are bent out of their place, and violently forced out of the natural position of their parts, have a spring of their own, and an inward strong propension to return to their own natural posture, which produces that motion of restitution, of which philosophers endeavour to give a reason. As, for example; air may be forced into much a lesser room, than that into which it would naturally expand itself: but, while it is under this violence, it has a spring, or strong *conatus*, to return to its proper state (of which several ingenious observations have been lately published by a learned hand). Now, sin being a violent and preternatural state, and a sinner's returning to God and righteousness being that motion, by which the soul is restored to its true freedom and ancient nature,—why should there not be such an elater or spring in the soul (quickened and enlivened by divine grace), such a natural *conatus*, of returning to its proper state again? Doubtless, there is; and the Scripture seems sometimes to acknowledge it, and to call it by the name of Spirit, when it speaks of our free-acting in God's ways, from an inward principle. For the spirit is not always to be taken for a breath or impulse from without: but, also, for an inward propension of the soul, awakened and re-

vived in it, to return to its proper state, as it is intellectual ; and then, to act freely in that state, according to its ancient nature. For, if the spirit were a mere external force acting upon the soul, without the concurrence of an inward principle, then, to be actuated by the spirit would be a state of violence to the soul, under which it could not delight always to continue ; whereas, the state of the spirit, is a state of freedom, and not of violence, as the apostle witnesses, when he calls it the freedom of the spirit : it is the soul's acting, from an inward spring and principle of its own intellectual nature, not by a mere outward impulse, like a boat, that is tugged on by oars, or driven by a strong blast of wind. Wherefore, the soul's returning from sin to righteousness, which is its primitive nature, must needs have great advantages ; for it goes on *secundo flumine*, according to the genuine current of its true intellectual nature, and has, besides, the assistance of a gentle gale of the Divine Spirit from without, to help it forward.

Why should it be thought so great an impossibility, for men willingly to do that, which is agreeable to the law of goodness ? Since this is the genuine nature of the soul, when freed from mistakes and incumbrances, from that which is heterogeneous and adventitious, from that which clogs and oppresses it ; and since every life and nature acts freely, according to its own propensions. Why should it seem strange, that the superior faculties of the soul should become predominant, since they are of a

lordly nature, and made to rule; and since the inferior faculties are of a servile temper, and made to be subject? Why should it seem impossible, for equity, light, and reason, to be enthroned in the soul of man again, and there to command and govern those exorbitant affections, which so lawlessly rebel against them? For, if some grave commanders and generals have been able, by the majesty of their very looks, to hush and silence a disorderly and mutinous rout of soldiers, — certainly reason, re-enthroned in her majestic seat, and re-invested with her ancient power and authority, which is natural, and not usurped, would, much more easily, be able to check and controul within us, the tumultuous rabble of appetites and passions.

Doubtless, God has no other design upon us, in religion, and the Gospel of his Son, than what is for our good; than to restore us to the rectitude and perfection of our beings. Wherefore, he seeks to redeem, and call off our affections, from the perishing vanities of this world; which, being so unspeakably below us, debase and pollute our spirits. He would not have us, therefore, addict ourselves wholly to the gratifications of our lower faculties, which are but the brute in us. But he would have our best faculties to be uppermost; the man, to rule the brute; and that which is of God in us, to rule our manly and rational faculties. He would not have us, Narcissus-like, to be always courting our own shadow in the stream. For, even according to the ancient Democritical phi-

losophy, this whole visible world is mere extended bulk, and has nothing real in it, but atoms or particles of a different magnitude, diversely placed, and agitated in a continual whirlpool. But all the colour, beauty, and varnish, all that which charms and bewitches us, in external objects, is nothing but the vital sensations and relishes of our own souls. These give all the paint and lustre to those outward beauties which we court and fall in love with ; which are, in themselves, as devoid of reality, and as fantastical, as the colours of the rainbow. So that, this outward world is not unfitly compared to an enchanted palace ; which seems, indeed, most pleasing and delightful to our deluded sense, but which, in reality, is all imaginary, a mere prestigious show ; those things, with which we are enamoured, thinking them to be without us, being nothing but the vital energies of our own spirits. In a word, God would have man to be a living temple, for himself to dwell in ; and man's faculties, instruments to be used and employed by him : which need not be thought impossible, if that be true, which philosophy tells us, that there is a certain near kindred and alliance, between the soul and God.

Lastly, we must observe, that, though this inward victory over sin, be no otherwise attainable, than by the Spirit of Christ, through faith ; and by a divine operation within us ; so that, in a certain sense, we may be said to be passive recipients : yet, we must not dream that our active co-operation

and concurrence, are not also necessarily required. For, as there is a Spirit of God in nature, producing vegetables and minerals, which human art and industry could never be able to effect; a certain nutritive spirit within, as the poet sings, which yet, does not work absolutely, unconditionally, and omnipotently, but requires certain preparations, conditions, and dispositions in the matter, which it works upon; (for, unless the husbandman plough the ground, and sow the seed, the Spirit of God in nature will not give any increase :) in like manner, the Scripture tells us, that the divine Spirit of grace does not work in the souls of men, absolutely, unconditionally, and irresistibly; but requires in us certain preparations, conditions, and co-operations; forasmuch, as it may both be quenched, and stirred up or excited, in our souls. And indeed, unless we plough up the fallow-ground of our hearts, and sow to ourselves in righteousness, as the prophet speaks, by our earnest endeavours, we cannot expect, that the divine Spirit of grace will shower down that heavenly increase upon us. Wherefore, if, by the spirit of Christ, we would attain a victory over sin, we must endeavour to fight a good fight, and run a good race, and to “enter in at the strait gate;” that so, overcoming, we may receive the crown of life. And thus much it shall suffice me to have spoken, at this time, concerning the first particular, *the victory over sin*.

I shall now proceed to speak something briefly to the two other *victories* that remain, which are

attainable also by Christ, over *the law* and over *death*.

And *the law* may be considered two manner of ways : first, as an outward covenant of works, which pronounces death and condemnation against all, who do not yield absolute and entire obedience to whatever is, by that law, commanded ; and which imposed also, with the same severity, a multitude of outward ceremonial observances, which had no intrinsic goodness in them, but kept men in a state of bondage and servility. Now, the law, in this sense, as it is an outward letter and covenant of works, is already conquered externally for us, by Christ's death upon the cross. " Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us ; for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree ; that the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles, through Jesus Christ, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit, through faith." And he has, thereby, freed us also from our obligation to those commandments which were not good ; having " broken down the middle wall of partition, that was between Jew and Gentile, abolishing in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments ; and blotting out the hand-writing of ordinances, that was against us, which was contrary to us, and taking it out of the way, nailing it to his cross."

Secondly, the law is, sometimes also, considered in Scripture, as an inward state of mind, wrought by the law and truth of God ; whether written out-

wardly in the letter of the Scripture, or inwardly in the conscience; prevailing only so far, as to beget a conviction of men's duty, and of the wrath of God against sin; but not enabling them, with inward strength and power, to do what is commanded, willingly, out of a love of it. It is such a state, when men are only passive to God's law, and unwillingly subject to it, as an enemy, for fear of wrath and vengeance. And this must needs be a state of miserable bondage and servility, distraction and perplexity of mind; when men are, at once, strongly convinced of the wrath of God against sin, and yet, under the power of their appetites, haling and dragging them to the commission of sin. It is that state, as I conceive, which Saint Paul describes after this manner: "The law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin: for that which I do, I allow not; for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I." * And again, "I see another law in my members, warring against my mind, and bringing me into captivity under the law of sin. O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from this body of death?" Now, from the law in this sense, that is, from the bondage and servility of the legal state, we are not delivered, nor made conquerors, by what Christ did outwardly upon the cross, as some imagine; as if he had there purchased for us an indulgence to sin without controul; but, by the inward working of his Holy Spirit, freeing us from the power and

* Rom. vii.

bondage of sin, and unbewitching us from the love of it.

Wherefore, there is a double freedom from this legal state, to be taken notice of; a true and a false freedom; which I cannot better explain, than by using the Apostle's own similitude, in the beginning of the seventh chapter: "Know ye not, brethren, that the law hath dominion over a man as long as he liveth? [or, rather, as long as *it*, that is, *the law*, liveth?] For the woman, which hath a husband, is bound by the law to her husband, so long as he liveth; but, if her husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of the husband. So then, if, while her husband liveth, she be married to another man, she shall be called an adulteress: but, if her husband be dead, she is free from that law; so that she is no adulteress, though she be married to another man." Here, the law is compared to a husband; and one that is under the law, or in a legal state, to a woman, that has a husband. Now, there are two ways, by which a woman may be freed from her husband: the one, if she break loose from him whilst he yet lives, contrary to the laws of wedlock, and marry another man; an undue and unlawful freedom, and then she is justly styled an adulteress; — another, if she stay till her husband be dead, and then, being free from the law of her husband, lawfully marries another man. In like manner, there are two ways, by which men may be freed from the law, as it is an inward state of bondage and servility: the first is,

when men, illegally and unlawfully, break loose from the law, which is their husband, whilst he is yet alive, and ought to have dominion over them, and marry themselves to another husband; which husband's name is carnal liberty, or licentiousness, too often miscalled in these latter times by the name of Christian liberty; and such as these, may well be styled, in the Scripture-language, adulterers and adulteresses: — but there is another freedom from the law, which is a due and just freedom, when we do not make ourselves free before the time, violently breaking loose from it; but when we stay, till the law, which is our husband, is dead, and the compulsory power of it is taken away, by the mortification of our desires and affections; and so, marry another husband, which is Christ, or the Spirit of righteousness: “The law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus, hath made me free from the law of sin and death.” *

Wherefore, there are three general states of men, in order to God and religion, of which we may here take notice.

The *first* is the state of those, who are alive to sin, and dead to the law. This the Apostle thus speaks of: “I was alive without the law once.” These are they, whose consciences are not yet considerably awakened to any sense of their duty, nor to the discrimination of good and evil; who sin freely, without any check or controul, without any quieting remorse of conscience.

* Rom. viii. 2.

The *second* state is, when men are at once alive both to the law and sin; to the conviction of the one, and the power and love of the other; both these struggling together, within the bowels of the soul; checking and controlling one another. This is a broken, confounded, and shattered state; and these, in the Apostle's language, are said to be slain by the law: "I was alive without the law once; but, when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died. And the commandment, which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death. For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew me." Here is no peace, rest, nor comfort, to be had in this state; men's souls being distracted and divided, by an intestine and civil war, between the law of the mind, and the law of the members, conflicting with one another.

The *third* state is, when men are dead both to the law and sin, and are "alive unto God and righteousness; the law of the Spirit of life, freeing them from the law of sin and death."

In the *first* of these three states, which is the most wretched and deplorable of all, we are sin's freemen; that is, free to commit sin, without check or controul.

In the *second*, we are bondmen to God and righteousness, and serve God out of a principle of fear, and according to an outward rule only; children of Hagar the bondmaid, and of the letter.

In the *third*, we are God's freemen and sons,

and serve him, in the newness of the spirit, out of a love to God and righteousness; children of the New Testament, and of Sarah the free woman.

Now, there are two mistakes or errors to be taken notice of, which defeat and disappoint the design of Christ in giving us the victory over the law.

The *first*, is the mistake of those, whom we have already mentioned; who seek to themselves a freedom from the bondage of the law, otherwise than by Christ and the Spirit of righteousness; namely, in a way of carnal liberty and licentiousness; whereby, instead of being bondmen to God and righteousness, they become perfect freemen to sin and wickedness; a state of the most deplorable thralldom in the world. These men, instead of going forward from the second state unto higher perfection, wheel back again to the first. Just, as if the children of Israel, after they had been brought out of Egypt, and had travelled a while in the desert of Arabia, where the law was given, — instead of entering into Canaan, should have wheeled back into Egypt, and there, enjoying the garlic, and onions, and flesh-pots, should persuade themselves this was, indeed, the true “land of promise, flowing with milk and honey.” And there is very great danger, lest, when men have been tired out, by wandering a long time in the dry and barren wilderness of the law, where they cannot enjoy the pleasure of sin as formerly, and yet, from their impatience, have not arrived to the relish and love of righteousness, — lest they should, at last, make more

haste than good speed, seduced by certain false shows of freedom, which are very tempting to such weary travellers, and which promise them much comfort and refreshment, inviting them to sit down under their shadow. Such are, a self-chosen holiness; ceremonial righteousness; opinionative zeal; the tree of knowledge, mistaken for the tree of life; high-flown enthusiasm and seraphicism; epicurizing philosophy; and antinomian liberty, under the pretence of free grace, and a gospel-spirit.

The *second* mistake, is, that of those, who would, by all means, persuade themselves, that there is no higher state of Christian perfection to be aimed at, or hoped for, in this life, than this legal state. That the good they would do, they do not; the evil they would not do, that they do; that the law of sin in their members, still leads them captive from the law of their minds. Now, for this presumptuous error, their sole ground is a novel interpretation of one paragraph in the Epistle to the Romans, contrary to other express places of Scripture, and to the sense of all ancient interpreters. And this opinion they support with as much zeal, as if it were a principal part of the gospel-faith, while, in fact, it is arrant infidelity; as if it were no less than presumption or impiety, to expect a living law written upon our hearts. But this, instead of seeking liberty from the bondage of the law, is to fall in love with our bonds and fetters; is plainly to deny the victory over the law, by Christ; and is to affirm, that the Gospel is but the ministration of

a dead and killing letter, and not of the Spirit which quickeneth and maketh alive.

I come now, in the *third* and *last* place, to the *victory over death*, expressed by the resurrection of the body to life and immortality. This, as it was meritoriously procured for us, by Christ's dying upon the cross, his resurrection afterward being an assured pledge of the same resurrection to us, so it will be really effected at last, by the same Spirit of Christ that gives us victory over sin here. "If the Spirit of him, that raised up Jesus dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead, shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit, that dwelleth in you : " — as though he had said, if the Spirit of Christ dwell in you, regenerating and renewing your souls, the self same Spirit shall also hereafter immortalize your very bodies. Avicen, the Mahometan philosopher, in his *Almahad*, has a conceit, that the meaning of the resurrection of the body, is merely to persuade vulgar people, that, though they seem to perish, and their bodies rot in the grave, when they die, — yet, they shall have a real subsistence after death, by which they shall be made capable, either of future happiness or misery. But, because the apprehensions of the vulgar are so gross, that the permanency and immortality of the soul is too subtile a notion for them, who commonly count their bodies for themselves, and cannot conceive, how they should have any being after death, unless their very bodies should be raised up again, — therefore, by way of

condescension to vulgar understandings, the future permanency and subsistence of the soul, in prophetic writings, is expressed under this scheme of the resurrection of the body, which yet is meant *κατὰ δόξαν* only, and not *κατ' ἀλήθειαν*. Which conceit, how well soever it may befit a Mahometan philosopher, I am sure it no way agrees with the principles of Christianity: for the Scripture, here and elsewhere, assures us, that the resurrection of the body is to be understood plainly, and without a figure; and that the saints, departed this life in the faith and fear of Christ, shall not be mere souls without bodies to all eternity, as Avicen, Maimonides, and other philosophers dreamed, but shall consist of soul and body united together. Which bodies, though, as the doctrine of the church instructs us, they shall be both specifically and numerically the same with what they were here, — yet, the Scripture tells us, they shall be so changed and altered, in respect of their qualities and conditions, that, in that sense, they shall not be the same: “Thou fool, that, which thou sowest, is not quickened, except it die: thou sowest not that body, that shall be, but bare grain, it may chance of wheat, or of some other grain: but God giveth it a body, as it pleaseth him, and to every seed his own body.” The Apostle here imitates the manner of the Jews, who, as appears from the Talmud*, were wont familiarly to illustrate the “resurrection of the body” by the similitude of seed sown into

* See Gemara, in Chetuboth, cap. 13. Ein Israel, num. 50.

the ground, and springing up again. Accordingly he goes on, “It is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption; sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory; sown in weakness, it is raised in power; sown a natural body, it shall be raised a spiritual body.” Which epithet was used also, in this case, both by the philosophers and the Jews; for Hierocles, upon the Golden Verses, calls them *ὀχήματα πνευματικά*, *vehicula spiritualia*, spiritual bodies; and R. Menachem, from the ancient cabalists, *רוחנות תלבושות*, the spiritual clothing. Lastly, the Apostle concludes, thus: “Now, this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, neither doth corruption inherit incorruption.” For which cause, he tells us elsewhere, that they, who do not die, must, of necessity, be changed. And, indeed, if men should be restored after death to such gross, foul, and cadaverous bodies, as these are here upon earth, which is the very region of death and mortality, without any change at all, — what else would this be, but, as Plotinus the philosopher writes against the Gnostics, *ἐγείρεσθαι εἰς ἄλλον ὕπνον*, to be raised up to a second sleep; or to be entombed again in living sepulchres? “For, the corruptible body presseth down the soul, and the earthly tabernacle weigheth down the mind, that museth upon many things.” Wherefore, we must needs explode that old Jewish conceit, commonly entertained amongst the rabbinical writers to this day, that the future resurrection is to be understood of such gross and corruptible bodies,

as these are here upon earth, to eat, drink, marry, and be given in marriage, and, which must needs follow, afterward to die again. Nachmanides, in his Shaar Haggemul, is the only Jewish author who ventures to depart from the common road here, and to abandon this popular error of the Jews, endeavouring to prove, that the bodies of the just, after the resurrection, shall not eat and drink, but be glorified bodies : but Abravanel * confutes him with no other argument than this ; that this was the doctrine and opinion of the Christians. Let us, therefore, now consider, how abundantly God has provided for us by Jesus Christ, in respect both of our souls, and of our bodies ; of our souls, in freeing us by the Spirit of Christ, if we be not wanting to ourselves, from the slavery of sin, and from the bondage of the law, as it is a letter only ; of our bodies, in that this corruptible shall put on incorruption, and this mortal shall put on immortality, and these vile bodies shall be made like unto Christ's glorious body. In both of which, the complete salvation of man consists ; in the perfection and happiness both of soul and body. For, though our salvation consists chiefly in the former, in the victory over sin, and in the renovation of the mind, yet without the latter, which is the victory

* In Nachalath Avoth, cap. 4. This is the very same with the opinion of the Christians, who hold, that after the resurrection, men shall not eat, drink, marry, or be given in marriage, or die again, but continue eternally in those bodies, resembling the heavenly bodies ; and these they vulgarly call glorified bodies.

over death, and the immortalizing of our bodies, it would be a very lame and imperfect thing. For righteousness alone, if it should dwell always in such inconvenient houses, as these earthly tabernacles are, however the high-flown Stoic may boast, could not render our condition otherwise, than troublesome, solicitous, and calamitous. Wherefore, the holy men in Scripture, not without cause, longed for this future change: "We groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our bodies." — "In this we groan earnestly, desiring to be clothed upon with our house, which is from heaven." But there is no obtaining this future victory over death and mortality, except we first get a victory over sin here. For this is that crown of life, which Christ, the first-begotten from the dead, will set upon the heads of none, but those, who have here fought a good fight, and overcome. For, as death proceeds only from sin and disobedience, so, the way to conquer death, and to arrive at life and immortality, is, by seeking after an inward conquest over sin. For "righteousness is immortal," and will immortalize the entertainers of it.* Hitherto we have shown, what the great things are, which we hope to attain by Christ, and after which we are to endeavour; namely, to procure an inward and real victory over sin, by the Spirit of Christ, that

* As the Chaldee oracle speaks: —

————— *ἐκτείνεις πύργον σου,*
Ἔργον ἐπ' εὐσεβείας ῥύσσει, καὶ σώμα σώσεις.

so, we may hereafter attain a victory over death and mortality. We cannot, now, but take notice briefly of some errors, of those, who, either pretending the impossibility of this inward victory over sin, or else hypocritically declining the combat, make up a certain religion to themselves, out of other things, which are either impertinent, and nothing to the purpose, or else evil and noxious.

For, first, some, as was intimated before, make to themselves a mere fantastical and imaginary religion; they conceit that there is nothing for them to do, but confidently to believe, that all is already done for them; that they are dearly beloved of God, without any conditions or qualifications to make them lovely. But such a faith as this, is nothing but mere fancy and carnal imagination, proceeding from that natural self-love, with which men fondly dote upon themselves, and are apt to think, that God loves them as fondly and as partially, as they love themselves, tying his affection to their particular outward persons, to their very flesh and blood: thus, making God a being like unto themselves, that is, wholly actuated by arbitrary self-will, fondness, and partiality; and perverting the whole nature and design of religion, which is, not a mere phantastory and historical show, but a *real* victory over the *real* evil of sin; without which, neither can God take pleasure in any man's person, nor can there be any possibility of happiness, any real turning of the soul from darkness unto light, from the power of Satan unto God.

Again, some there are, who, instead of walking in the narrow way, which Christ commends, of subduing and mortifying our sinful appetites, make to themselves certain other narrow ways of affected singularity, in things which belong not to life and godliness; outward strictnesses and severities, of their own chusing and devising; and who persuade themselves, that this is the strait gate and narrow way of Christ, which leadeth unto life. Whereas, these are, indeed, nothing else but some particular paths, and narrow slices, cut out of the broad way. For, though they have an outward and seeming narrowness, yet they are so broad within, that camels with their burthens, may easily pass through them. These, instead of taking up Christ's cross upon them, make to themselves certain crosses of their own; and, laying them upon their shoulders and carrying them, please themselves with a conceit, that they bear the cross of Christ; while, in truth and reality, they are frequently too much strangers to that cross, by which the world should be crucified to them, and they unto the world.

Some place all their religion in endless scrupulosities about indifferent things, neglecting, in the mean time, the more weighty matters, both of law and gospel; straining at a gnat, and swallowing a camel; that is, being not so scrupulous, as they ought to be, about the substantials of religion, and a good life. For, as we ought not to place the chief of our religion in the mere observance of outward rites and ceremonies, whilst, in the mean time,

we hypocritically neglect the morals and substantial, which may deservedly be branded with the name of superstition: so, we ought to know, that it is equal superstition, to have such an abhorrence of indifferent things, as to make it the main of our religion to abstain from them. Both of these argue equal ignorance of the nature of God, as if he were some morose, humorous, and captious being; and of that righteousness, in which the kingdom of God consists; as if these outward and indifferent things could either hallow or defile our souls, or as if salvation and damnation depended upon the mere using or not using of them. The Apostle himself instructs us, that the kingdom of God consists no more in uncircumcision than in circumcision; that is, no more in not using outward ceremonies and indifferent things, than in using them. Wherefore, the negative superstition is equal to the positive. And both of them alike call off men's attention from the main objects of religion, by engaging them over-much in small and little things. But the sober Christian, who neither places all his religion in external observances, nor yet is superstitiously anti-ceremonial,—as he will think himself obliged to have a due regard to the commands of lawful authority, in adiaphorous things, and to prefer the peace and unity of the Christian church, and the observation of the royal law of charity, before the satisfaction of any private humour or interest, — so he will be aware of that extreme, into which many run, of banishing away, quite out of

the world, all the solemnity of external worship, the observance of the Lord's day, and the participation of the Christian sacraments, under the notion of useless ceremonies. To conclude; unless there be a due and timely regard had to the commands of lawful authority, in indifferent things, and to order, peace, and unity in the church, it may easily be foreseen, that the reformed part of Christendom will be brought to confusion, and at length to utter ruin by crumbling into infinite sects and divisions.

Again, many mistake the vices of their natural complexion for supernatural and divine graces. Some think that dull and stupid melancholy, is Christian mortification: others, that turbulent and fiery zeal, is the vigour of the Spirit. Whereas, zeal is one of those things, which Aristotle calls of a middle nature; neither good nor bad in itself, but which, as it is circumstanced, may indifferently become either virtue or vice. For there is a bitter zeal, as the Apostle calls it, which is contrary to all Christian love and charity; and which is nothing else, but the vices of acerbity, envy, malice, cruelty; tintured and gilded over with a religious show. And there may be also a turbulent and factious zeal, when men, under a pretence of acting for the glory of God, violate just and lawful authority, in order to the advancement of their own private self-interest. Indeed, there was amongst the Jews a certain right, called the right of zealots; by which private persons, actuated by a zeal for God, might do immediate execution upon certain malefactors,

without expecting the sentence of any court of judicature. And some conceive, that, by this right of zealots, our Saviour whipped the buyers and sellers out of the temple, and overturned the tables of the money-changers; because he was never called into question by the Jews, for those acts. But this was then a legal and regular usage, permitted, in some certain cases, by the public laws of that nation; yet so, as that those zealots were afterward accountable to the Sanhedrim, for what they did. However, a little before the destruction of the temple, as Josephus tells us, there were a crew of desperate miscreants, who, abusing this right, and calling themselves by the name of zealots, made a pretext from thence to commit most villainous actions. And I wish some had not too much entertained the opinion, that private persons might reform public abuses, whether belonging to the ecclesiastical or the civil polity, without and against the consent of the supreme magistrate, in a turbulent manner, by the right of zealots; nay, and that actions, otherwise altogether unwarrantable in themselves, may be justified, by zeal for God, and good ends. But God needs no man's zeal, to promote an imaginary interest of his in the world, by doing unjust things for him. "Will you speak wickedly for God, or talk deceitfully for him? will you accept his person?" was the generous expostulation of Job with his friends; and he tells them in the following words, that this was nothing else, but "to mock God, as one man mocketh another."

True divine zeal is no corybantic fury; it is a calm and regular heat, guided and managed by light and prudence, and carried out principally, neither for, nor against, indifferent rites and unnecessary opinions, but for those things which are immutably good, and fundamental to Christianity; always acknowledging a due subordination to that authority, civil and ecclesiastical, which is over us.

Lastly, some there are, whose pretence to religion and the Spirit is founded in nothing else but a faculty of rhetoricating and extemporizing with zeal and fervency; which they take to be nothing less than divine inspiration, and that which the Scripture calls, "praying in the Holy Ghost," an undoubted character of a person truly regenerated. This is a great delusion, by which many are hindered from seeking after the real effects of the divine Spirit; idolizing, instead of it, that which is merely natural, if not artificial: I think it not impertinent, therefore, here to speak a little of it. And certainly, that, which is frequently attained to, in the very height, by persons grossly hypocritical and debauched, can never be concluded to be divine inspiration, can never proceed from any higher principle, than mere natural enthusiasm. For there is not a only a poetical enthusiasm, of which Plato discourses in his *Ion*, but, though oratory be a more sober thing, there is a rhetorical enthusiasm also, which makes men very eloquent, affectionate, and bewitching in their language, beyond what the power of any bare art and precepts could enable

them to reach ; insomuch that both poets and orators have, oftentimes, fancied themselves to be indeed divinely inspired : as those known verses testify :

Est Deus in nobis, agitante calescimus illo ;

And,

Sedibus æthereis Spiritus ille venit.

And, concerning orators, the like might be proved, if the time would here permit, by sundry testimonies. But I shall here instance only in Aristides, a famous orator, who not only speaks positively of himself, as inspired in his orations, but affirms the same also, concerning rhetoric in general, when it is extraordinary, that it comes by immediate inspiration, as oracles and prophecies do, and not from art or nature. Wherefore, it is not at all to be wondered at, if, when men are employed in religious and devotional exercises, the same natural enthusiasm, (especially having the advantage of religious melancholy, which makes men still more enthusiastical,) should so wing and inspire the fancies of these religious orators, as to make them wonderfully fluent, eloquent, and rapturous, so that they beget strange passions in their auditors, and conclude themselves to be divinely inspired. Whereas, they may, in fact, have no more of divine inspiration in all this, than those poets and orators before mentioned had ; that is to say, they are no otherwise inspired, than by a rhetorical or hypochondriacal enthusiasm, which is

merely natural. But it is far from my intention here to disparage the sincere and ardent affections of devout souls, naturally and freely breathing out their earnest desires unto God in private ; although, perhaps, this be not without some kind of enthusiasm also. For enthusiasm, as well as zeal, and other natural things, may be well used, and, being rightly circumstantiated and subservient to a better principle, becomes irreprehensible. Some have observed, that no great work of the brain, which begot much admiration in the world, was ever achieved without some kind of enthusiasm ; and the same may be affirmed, of the most transcendently virtuous and heroical actions. But then, the goodness of these actions is never to be estimated, merely by the degree of enthusiastic heat and ardour that is in them, but by such other laws and circumstances, as moralize human actions. Wherefore, my meaning, as I said before, is only this, to caution men against that vulgar and popular error, of mistaking the natural and enthusiastical fervour of their spirits, and the ebulliency of their fancy, when it is tinctured with religion, — and against idolizing it, as though it were the supernatural grace of God's Holy Spirit ; to caution them, in a word, against the error, of looking for the effect of God's Spirit principally in words and talk, and against thinking, that God is chiefly glorified with a loud noise, and long speeches. For the true demonstration of God's Holy Spirit is no where to be looked for, but

in life and action, or in such earnest and affectionate breathings after a further participation of the divine image, as are accompanied with real and unfeigned endeavours to attain it: this is the true praying in the Holy Ghost, though there be no extemporaneous effusion of words. And, therefore, when some Corinthians were puffed up, by reason of a faculty which they had of rhetoricating religiously, Saint Paul, like an apostle, tells them, that he would come amongst them and “know, not the speech of them that were puffed up, but the power. For the kingdom of God consisteth not in word, but in power and life.” Wherefore, laying aside these, and similar childish mistakes, and things which are little to the purpose, let us seriously apply ourselves to the main work of our religion: that is, to mortify and vanquish our sinful natures, by the assistance of God’s Holy Spirit, through faith in Christ; that so, being dead to sin here, we may live with God eternally hereafter.

THE END.

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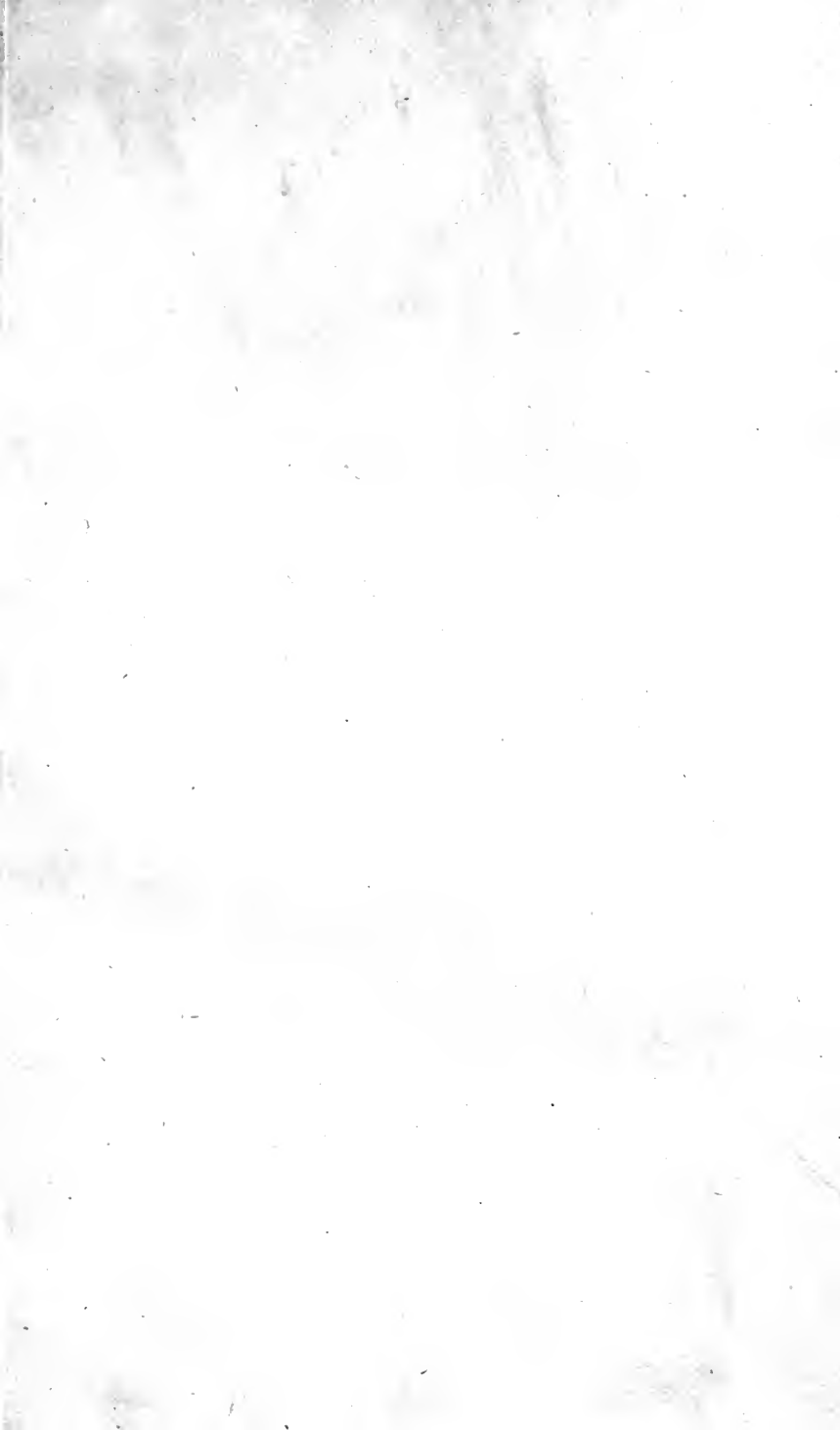
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